

HELLBOUND IN EL SALVADOR:
HEAVY METAL AS A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

by
Christian Pack

A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Baltimore, Maryland

October, 2018

© 2018 Christian Pack

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Heavy Metal in El Salvador has been a driving force of the underground culture since the Civil War in the 1980s. Over time, it has grown into a large movement that encompasses musicians, producers, promoters, media outlets and the international exchange of music, ideas and live shows. As a music based around discontent with society at large, Heavy Metal attempts to question the *status quo* through an intellectual exploration of taboo subjects and the presentation of controversial live shows. As an international discourse, Heavy Metal speaks to ideas of both socio-political and individual power based around a Philosophy of Life that exalts personal freedoms and personal responsibility to oneself and their society. As a community, it represents a ‘rage’ group, as defined by Peter Sloterdijk, that questions Western epistemologies and the doctrines of Christian Philosophy. This is done in different ways, by different genres, but at the heart is the changing of macro- (international) discourses into micro- (local) discourses that focus on those issues important to the geographic specificity of the region. In the case of Black Metal, born in Norway, it is interpreted in El Salvador through the similarities between the doctrines of Hitler and those of the most famous dictator in the country’s history – General Maximiliano Hernandez – and then applied, ironically, to the local phenomena of the Salvadoran Street Gangs (MS-13 and 18s) and their desired extermination. It is also done through the re-interpreting of folk metal in the local phenomenon of tribal metal that reinterprets the indigenous through the lens of modern society and heavy metal’s ideas of power. Finally, the Salvadoran metalhead adapts the genre’s vulgarity and dark humor to fuel their own systems of dealing with harsh repression and existing within a society that seems to have no place for them. At

the bottom though, much more than a community, Heavy Metal in El Salvador is a source of *fraternalismo* that utilizes the Philosophy of Life to bind its members together and to provide them a means by which to express their personal freedoms within a society that would happily see them limited.

Acknowledgments

In order for a project like this to come together, many different things have to miraculously come together – out of the ether and into life. But for that to happen, it is necessary to surround oneself with those people that make achievements like these possible. There are so many people that I could thank. So many, in fact, that I could probably write another book on just those people that have helped to make this happen. I would like first, however, to thank those that helped me to realize that studying Heavy Metal at a place like Johns Hopkins was an actual possibility and not just a silly dream (as many have called it). First and foremost, I would like to thank Christopher Ray Alexander not only for being the first to tell me, “Oh yeah, you could totally do that”, but also for being the person who stuck with me over my years at Johns Hopkins and supported me both academically and emotionally through many hard and difficult times – your kind words will *never* be forgotten. I would also like to thank my co-conspirators, or “colleagues” as some call them, from the 2012 cohort: Matteo Cantarello, Mary Speer and Francisco Gomez-Martos. If it wasn’t for your constant support and belief in me, I would never have even made it through the first two years of the program. I would like to thank Sara Castro-Klaren for supporting, and correcting, my writing and helping me to become the writer that I am today. Of course, my advisors William Egginton and Eduardo Gonzalez. Professor Egginton, your grace as a person and your ability to express a confidence in my abilities, that I have many times been unable to see on my own, has kept me sane and on the right track throughout the researching and writing of this thesis. Professor Gonzalez, I thank you for always including me in literally *anything* that had to do with my interests, for supporting a thesis topic that originally received some resistance, for

inspiring me creatively as a writer and as a thinker and, most of all, for putting up with my own eccentricities and personality flaws. I would like to thank Nelson Varas-Díaz for supporting me on the ground in Puerto Rico, but most importantly, for helping me to publish my first academic paper in the *International Metal Music Studies Journal*. But, most of all, academically, professionally, emotionally, and personally, I would like to thank Kathy Loehmer for not only being my own personal bodyguard, watchdog and personal therapist, but most of all for being a good friend when I needed one the most and for making me feel at home when I no longer had one.

In El Salvador, there are hundreds of people that I could thank. Many of them are featured in this thesis, and many I was not able to include do to the scope of the paper and limits on my own time, talent and abilities. Nonetheless, I would like to thank both Alex “el Negro Centenario” Palacios and “Mala Vida” for supporting me with a place to live, cold beer in my belly, access to the local scene and, more importantly, a brotherly friendship that I hope will last forever – or until all three of us crash and burn at a young age, hopefully (Live Fast! Die Young!). I would like to thank Edwin Marinero for admitting on national radio that I am the only *gringo* that he has ever liked but also for giving me access to Metalfest, to various rural concerts, music, videos, contraband, and everything that I ever needed and/or asked for. I hope that this thesis does your 30 years of experience in the scene justice and that it somehow opens a door that will justify each and every one of them. I would like to thank Vicente “Chente” Sibrian for your always kind words, for sharing your experience, for bragging about me and calling me “six-pack”, but also for always remembering me and never giving up on me. As an extension, I would have to thank Radio Astral for their kind invitations to speak on air and for putting me in touch with

the majority of bands that I now know – without this door being opened my circle of friends would be much, much smaller. A special thanks to my friends from SinsoLoft who, even though the Loft and some of you are gone, I will never forget and am immensely in your debt for the brotherhood that you offered me and also for quite a few bar tabs: Roberto “Mad” Rosales, Roberto “Ula Ula” Ardon, Giovanni Rosales, Francisco “Chele Dismember” Villalta, Iosif Najarro, Saul Armando “Gallina” Martínez Audon, and, especially, José “Chepe” Solomon – who I will miss greatly and wish I had given you a copy of this work before your early departure, hopefully some day we will rock together in whichever end of the great beyond you are in. A very special thanks to Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga for being my “brother from another mother”, for inviting me on tour, for trusting in my abilities at live shows (despite my constant complaining) and mostly for always being there when I need someone to tell me to “stop being a *culero*”. And finally, a hearty thank you to the bands Araña, Dreamlore, Virginia Clemm, Social S.S. and Indezoquixtia who not only helped with my studies but made me feel like a part of their bands and their community – I consider all of you close friends and hope to continue to join you for concert after concert until this body will no longer allow it.

On a much more personal note, however, I must thank my kids for their constant patience, their support, their kindness, their love and affection and for not ever giving up on me; even though many people had many things to say about my decisions, you all stuck with me: Salvador Lopez, you have always stuck by me even when you had no reason and you taught me that there are so many things more important than blood to make a real relationship; Gloria Sarai Pack, your love, your music, your drawings and most of all your undying encouragement through tough times; Jack Pack, my favorite athlete and comedian, laughing with you has always

been one of my favorite things and I hope to do it forever; David “Jonny” Pack, your intelligence and amazing character, even from a young age, have always been inspirational to me; and Elizabeth Pack, who loves her Daddy, you brighten my world and ‘turn it up to 11’ with every one of your little mannerisms and especially when we throw up the devil horns together; Xavier Elian Avila-Hernandez, mi papi, I love playing with you and feel honored to be a recipient of your love and affection; and Angelique Verenice Pack, my daughter, your ability to encourage me, to make me feel special, has turned my world around and I count it as a blessing to be your father, your friend and your confidant. Without any of you, I would be completely lost and I love each and every one of you with the entirety of my being. I hope that this work, and I, make you proud. My best friend, Mairo Ferreira, for helping me to meet Sepultura in Sao Paulo (a dream come true), for every bit of advice you have ever given me and mostly, for putting up with me at my worst and bragging about me at my best. Thank you to Carlos Silvera for taking my classes, for being the most enthusiastic student, hands-down, that I have ever had the pleasure of teaching, and finally, for becoming a friend that I hope to have around forever. And, saving the best for last, Dinora Lizeth Pack – there are so many words that I could write to praise everything that you have done for me. This thesis would have never been completed if it was not for your support and your prodding. I cannot express how much I love you and appreciate everything that you have done for me. You are the love of my life and I hope that I will be able not only to make you proud but to walk beside you until I give up my last breath.

Thank you all for everything!! No project is done alone. This thesis is a testament to what good friends, family and a little bit of love can do for a person and, by extension, for those that they care for.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 – Scanned copy of *Suplicio* fanzine provided by Edwin Marinero, p. 34.

Figure 2 – Marian, Jakub. “Metal bands per 1 million people in South America”.

Jakubmarian.com. 19 Jan. 2018. Web. 20 Sept 2018.

<https://jakubmarian.com/metal-bands-per-1-million-people-in-south-america/>,

p. 36.

Figure 3 – Malignant Wizard self-titled album cover and inserts provided by Edwin Marinero, p. 99.

Figure 4 – Popular meme of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and his laws for punishment of criminal offenses borrowed from HistoriasdeElSalvador’s twitter page. <https://twitter.com/eshistoria32/status/7497688970757038080>, p. 104.

Figure 5 - Abacus’ cartoon was featured on the online journal, *Hunnpah*. 12 Feb 2014. <http://hunna.org/de-naufragios-sobrevivientes-y-salvadoreos/>, p. 131.

Figure 6 – Edgar Allan Poe t-shirt design for Maryland Deathfest borrowed from Maryland Deathfest’s Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/MarylandDeathfest/photos/9.393324644039379/676457275726113/?type=3>, p. 141.

Figure 7 – Zombie Jesus with drumsticks t-shirt design for El Salvador Metalfest borrowed from Metal Crítico El Salvador’s Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/MetalCritico/photos/a.390201964110/10152252749209111/?type=3>, p. 142.

Figure 8 – Mel Gibson meme provided by Alexander “Negro” Palacios, p. 174.

Figure 9 – Facebook post by Jose Roberto Burgos Salinas of Dreamlore, p. 199.

Table of Contents

Prologue.....	1
Introduction.....	16
Heavy Metal as Musical Discourse.....	16
A Brief History of Salvadoran Metal.....	25
Contemporary Salvadoran Society as a source of Rage	38
Chapter 1 “Desfilando en la miseria”: Heavy Metal as a Source of Empowerment and the Culture of ‘Valeverguismo’	46
Power and Reality	50
Gender and Power.....	54
El <i>valeverguismo</i> as an expression of power	64
The Stage and Spectacle as a Source of Social Protest.....	69
The <i>Mara Salvatrucha</i> connection and socio-political power	74
Chapter 2 “Invocando las tinieblas”: Hitler and Contemporary Death Squads	86
Black Metal roots in El Salvador	95
Martínez, Hitler and Virkenes.....	112
The Final Solution for El Salvador?	118
Chapter 3 “Indigenas sangrando libertad”: National Identity and the Phenomena of ‘Indigenismo’	123
Salvadoran National Identity	126
<i>Positivismo</i> , Modernity and Indigenous Thought	144
Tribal Metal, <i>Indigenismo</i> and Rebellion	149
Chapter 4 “Bestias alcohólicas”: Sex, Drugs and Social Rebellion.....	158
Pornographic Imagery.....	161
Profane Language and Dark Humor	167
Homoerotic Acts	175
Explorations of Violence	179
Alcoholism.....	184
Conclusion	192
Discography	210
Works Cited	215
Biography.....	223

Prologue

As with any study, this dissertation bears a long history with its writer's own personal past. I first came into contact with the Salvadoran community when I was fourteen years-old, living in Frederick, MD. As a small town on the outskirts of Washington, DC with quick access to major cities, Frederick became home to a small, but quickly growing, Salvadoran community when I was young. My first contact with this specific community of immigrants was through my first job at Burger King where Paula, who worked in the kitchen, took the time to teach me Spanish and invite me to her home where her and her husband taught me about Salvadoran culture.

As a relatively sheltered child, due to my father's fundamentalism, the culture clash between me and my new friends was a big one. However, I quickly learned that many of my own ideas about El Salvador, Spanish-speaking immigrants and my own community (and heritage) were greatly flawed. Nothing challenged them more than my first trip to El Salvador in 2003 at the age of 18. As Paula and her husband had returned home, I went to visit them at their house in a rural town called Ilobasco. The town, famous for local artisanal crafts made of clay, seemed to me to be a town lost in time. It felt, to me, as if I had stepped back in time.

While I understood the language at this point, I still had much to learn about the culture. I learned that the rural, agriculture culture was a very specific one. Life consisted for them, from my perspective, of working long hours in hard labor in order to provide for very large families. As my own family was very small, it was strange to me to see families with upwards of ten children. However, when I learned about the staunch Catholicism of the rural poor and the fact that education was inaccessible to

the majority of the population in these areas, I quickly understood why this culture is the way that it is.

Along with this lack of education, however, came many problems. Often families would be overextended economically due to the large number of mouths to feed, and sometimes simply due to the lack of work opportunities and access to a basic standard of living. Many Salvadorans, with good reason, blamed their own government for the majority of the poverty and its resulting issues. Years and years of political corruption, military coups, guerilla fighting, lack of an ability to make real political change and basic apathy on the part of many citizens had created a system where the majority of Salvadorans must fight each other for survival (which is no surprise in a country of over 6 million inhabitants within an area the size of Massachusetts). Despite all of these socio-political pressures, however, I also quickly learned that the average Salvadoran was somehow *happier* than most of the people that I know stateside.

This *happiness* I found to be from a general acceptance of their living conditions. In other words, pressed up against a hard life, the best option was to accept it, pretend that the hardships did not matter and to look for the best in everyday life. I found this to be true over and over again. While some Salvadorans would drown their worries in extreme alcoholism (which is still very prevalent), most attempt to be successful members of their own communities, in whatever capacity they can. For some, this means staying home and caring for a family. For others, it means joining local political campaigns to try and change the political structure of the country. And for others, it meant a retreat to the United States where better opportunities were promised – even if they knew that they might never return from the trip.

Other than their own society, however, many Salvadorans that I met had a large sense of spite towards the United States. While I never felt any type of persecution for being ‘American’ (actually quite the opposite was true, as many people would even come to the house that I was staying at just to take a picture with me), many people expressed their frustrations to me in personal conversation. The majority of the issues surrounded three major problems for the Salvadoran populace, as a whole: 1) military interventionism that helped to end the Civil War but left the country with an ineffective system of Peace Accords that has caused further problems for the average citizen; 2) the forcing of North American culture and Western ideologies on a country that already has issues with its own local past and history of colonization; and 3) the implementation of the United States Dollar (USD) as local currency, as recommended by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

While American military interventionism can be cited as a problem throughout the Americas (and even beyond – the Middle East and rise of ISIS being prime examples), the arrival of ‘Americans’ to El Salvador during the end of the Civil War seems to be marked as a major turning point for the socio-political growth of the country, by most Salvadorans. While the FMLN (leftist) guerilla movement had taken its toll on the oligarchical, right-wing ARENA government, it was not until almost the last minute that the US government decided to get involved. For those fans of socialism (or as the US government labeled it – ‘communism’), the arrival of the ‘Americans’ was the decisive blow to their guerilla campaign and to their citizenry. For many, it was no longer seen as a ‘fair fight’ between two local factions attempting to solve local problems, but now a fight between the poor and the ‘international policing’ of Big Brother in the United States. The major concern, however, on both sides, was that the American intervention would eventually mean an American ‘taking

over' of the sovereign processes of the country – something that has proven to be true since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992.

The Peace Accords themselves were meant to help rebuild the country and to put it back onto the 'world stage' both economically and politically. The four objectives decided at the Geneva Agreement of 4 April 1990 by the United Nations and representatives of the ARENA government of El Salvador were: 1) "to end the armed conflict by political means"; 2) "to promote democratization of the country"; 3) "to guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights"; and 4) "to reunify Salvadoran society."¹ For the academic, the reading of these 'objectives' should not be shocking. The spread of Western ideals like "democracy", "human rights" and "unity" have always been on the ostensible agenda of the United States' international policies and the driving force behind their intervention internationally. The problem, as explained by many Salvadoran citizens to me, is that these programs and "objectives" never took into consideration the local culture, socio-political history or even the possibilities of their effectiveness when expanded within a corrupt political system that was on the brink of collapse only a few days before the signing of the accords. In other words, the Accords, to many, seemed like a band-aid placed on a leaking dam. While it might slow the leak, the buildup would eventually cause the band-aid to fail and a flood to follow.

This 'buildup' would be increased exponentially by the acceptance of the US Dollar (USD) as local currency and the disposal of the Salvadoran Colón under the ARENA government of Francisco Flores Pérez in 2001. Seen as a means to raise the local economy and to place El Salvador back onto the stage of world economics, the

¹ United Nations, ii.

acceptance of the dollar (as expected by many) only further helped to exasperate the economic divide of the Salvadoran citizenry. While a small, new middle class began to emerge, the “haves” in the local government and international business benefited exponentially from the change in currency as it facilitated international business, the arrival of American business (McDonald’s, WalMart, etc.) and the new facility of large-scale embezzlements – as the accusations against the very same President Francisco Flores of embezzling 10 million dollars over the course of his presidency² can confirm. For the “have-nots”, however, the arrival of the US Dollar only meant greater poverty. For example, a can of NIDO (powdered milk formula for babies) under the colón system was affordable to the majority of the population, however, with the US Dollar, the same *lata* [can] inflated to almost \$20 USD. For Salvadorans who were earning \$5 to \$6 USD daily (for 12 – 15 hours of work), the ability to buy a very much needed resource for their children became out-of-reach. Part of this is due to the fact that, while the USD was implemented, the local business people did *effectively* change over to the new system from the old system of the colon. Simple conversions were made (i.e., this many colones = this many dollars) and important factors, like inflation, were not considered at a local level. So, as prices would rise as influenced by international business in the capital of San Salvador, the rural communities would continue to pay based upon the simple conversions (something that still happens today).

For many Salvadorans, it was impossible to survive within this new system. For the ruling class, oligarchical families and those with access to education and employment, the Peace Accords and arrival of the USD were a godsend. For the majority of the rest of the country, they were a curse. The result, then, was a country

² Delcid. *CNN Español*.

of people living with a ‘dog-eat-dog’, ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality – something that has been pointed out to me by my friends in El Salvador on a constant basis. The only other answer that Salvadorans were able to find was the mass emigration to the United States that began during the Civil War and continues unto today. For many, emigration is *the* only option. For many years, I tried to convince myself that this was not true. However, around 2006 or 2007, these ideas were changed when I went with my friend Paula and her husband, Manuel, to the US Embassy in El Salvador to watch them apply for a visa to return to the United States.

I was always under the impression that people immigrated ‘illegally’ to the United States because they wanted to avoid lawful entry or because of a general sense of lawlessness or disrespect for American laws. However, at the embassy, I watched as Paula paid \$100 USD for a visa interview. At the interview, she was denied the visa because she did not have \$8,000 USD in her bank account or \$8,000 USD worth of property in her name. For someone living in a rural community, only making \$5 - \$6 USD a day, saving up \$8,000 USD is impossible. Even if she tried saving the money, she would die of old age before achieving the goal. I also watched as many others were denied visas and given *no reason* as to why. Just a simple “no”. This did not stop the embassy from keeping the \$100 dollars of each of the hundreds that stood in line for their interviews from 6 o’clock in the morning (many traveling 2 – 3 hours just to be there, like Paula and Manuel). I learned here that, yes, it *is* possible to come to the United States legally with a visa, *if* you belong to the middle or upper class of the country – in other words, if you are among those that do not really *need* to go. After this point, I realized why so many people would risk their lives to cross international borders illegally – risking death, rape, abandonment, etc. – just for the hopes of sending enough money home for their family to live better lives and, maybe,

earn access to things like education, clean water, better roads and the pipe-dream of gainful employment.

It is no surprise to me, then, that the contemporary discourse in the United States, backed by President Trump, about immigration from places like El Salvador, is centered on the idea that “they are not sending their finest”. The fact is that “their finest” have no reason to come to the United States. They can continue to take advantage of the systems implemented by the United States to keep themselves rich and the poor masses at bay. In the United States, the recognition that the poor classes are the ones that need to come here illegally (due to the construction of the system as such) is seen as a negative connotation against a class of citizens that would have preferred to stay in their country had the United States not intervened and placed failing political systems and ideologies upon them. The next key to the puzzle of immigration, then, would be the most recognized phenomenon to ‘exit’ El Salvador – the Salvadoran Street Gang.

The *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and *Barrio 18* street gangs are the most talked about phenomenon concerning El Salvador in the international press. However, many forget the fact that the Street Gangs were created *here in the United States*. The gangs utilize a mixture of guerilla and American street gang tactics to ‘control’ their neighborhoods, or territories. The guerilla side comes from the fact that many of those Salvadorans who fled to the United States in the first wave of ‘illegal’ emigration to the United States were ex-guerilla fighters who knew that the Peace Accords would mean that the government would have a right to now track them down. Many of these Salvadorans took refuge in the lower-class neighborhoods of major cities like Los Angeles – where they could be close to communities that spoke their own language and where they could continue to enjoy their own culture.

In fact, the marginalization of Latino immigrants is a major factor in the accessibility of the Street Gangs to new, potential members. The children of the guerilla fighters (and even ex-police and military) were now stuck within a new community where they did not know the language, yet they were forced to go to school and to exist within a community that did not accept them. Fights between other lower-economic classes of Latinos (Mexicans and Chicanos) and the African-American gangs taught these Salvadorans that they must learn to defend themselves or possibly die. But on a much smaller level, the creation of small communities of Latino immigrants (especially from countries like El Salvador) was always a survival tactic as these immigrants, given their status, are unable to properly assimilate due to lack of economic resources, marginalization from other ethnic groups (whites and African-Americans), a rejection of their culture and language and (possibly most importantly) their demonization by American politicians in national press. In other words, recognizing that they are not wanted and will not be accepted, many of these immigrants formed their own stable communities within which they could have a semblance of functionality yet always had to fight against those communities around them.

Thus, the Salvadoran Street Gang was born. Of course, the answer to the problem from politicians in the United States was the mass deportation culture that was fueled by the atrocious events of September 11th, 2001. Given a new discourse of a “war against terror”, *any* violent, or revolutionary, group was now considered a threat against American sovereignty and way-of-life. In the international arena, the wars in the middle east and the rise of groups, like the Taliban and ISIS, further fueled the circular issue that American interventions only further perpetuate the very same problems that they attempt to fix. While these groups become increasingly more

violent and increasingly less concerned with *who* they target, the rage that they feel is a shared rage – the same rage born from the fact that they are not allowed to exist on their own terms but that they *must* adopt Western ideals, like American Democracy and, in many cases, Christianity. These issues are only further exasperated by the fact that the demonization of these groups prohibits them from becoming part of the discussion and only adds to their rage towards the United States, towards their own governments and towards any group that opposes them.

The dehumanization of immigrants in the United States as ‘illegal’ beings is only one of the many factors that have contributed to the issue that helped to create the Salvadoran Street Gang and to deport it back to El Salvador, where lawlessness has become much easier than ‘straight’ living. So, on the surface, Trump is right about many immigrants from the region when he says that they do not want to assimilate or that they do not ‘send their best’. However, he fails to mention that the marginalization of immigrants as ‘illegals’, the mass deportation culture and the failure to provide an *actual, effective* path to legal status only contributes further to the group’s isolation and lack of ability to properly assimilate, thus amplifying the very issue that he repudiates. In my experience, no immigrant of “lower class” is any worse than our own “lower classes.” The best way to keep these groups subdued is to make them believe that they are each other’s enemies based upon ideas like ‘race’, ‘nationality’ and ‘language’. While all of these things exist and are contributing factors to the fracturing of social groups, it is the ruling class that helps to exasperate these differences – hence the mass movements of hatred towards immigrants in recent years. The entire situation, though, we must remember is born from American intervention in our neighboring countries, both military and economic, and will continue to grow unless the band-aid is removed and a *real* solution is reached. Apart

from American intervention, the discourses promoted by President Trump and his supporters is another crucial factor to the growth of socio-political problems both for Salvadorans at home and abroad. At the base of Trump's discourses on immigration, that I have here examined, and in his politics is actually found a rhetoric of Fascism. While this may seem like a bold claim, the dehumanizing of immigrants as 'dangerous', 'law-breaking' and 'stealers of resources' fits perfectly into fascist politics (as does the labeling of MS13 gang members as 'animals who do not deserve to live'). As I explore in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Jason Stanley describes fascist politics as involving eight different aspects: 1) the creation of a mythic past, 2) propaganda, 3) anti-intellectualism, 4) unreality, 5) hierarchy, 6) victimhood, 7) law and order, and 8) sexual anxiety. Within Trump's anti-immigration discourse, almost all of these aspects can be found.

Essentially, Trump has turned the minority group of, namely, Central American (and Mexican) immigrants into the "they" of his fascist rhetoric, reserving the "us" for White America. In essence, by painting the immigrant as a rampant, inhuman law-breaker, Trump eludes to a *mythic past* in which America was white and, in his words, "great". In this past, the white male was at the top of the social (and familiar) *hierarchy*. His propaganda of "Make America Great Again" is a call to 're-establish' this hierarchy through the use of *law and order*. Those white Americans who are duped by this rhetoric (because, let's face it, the lower and even middle-class of white Americans would not be included in Trump's 'utopian' vision of the country) feel a sense of *victimhood* that they have been robbed both of their 'rightful place in society' and of the resources to reclaim it – by 'they', the immigrants, of course. This victimhood pushed these Americans towards *anti-intellectualism* as the universities are seen as protectors of both immigrants and other minority groups that seek to upset

the hierarchy (i.e., homosexuals, feminists seeking equal rights, etc.). The inclusion of these later groups creates a sense of *sexual anxiety* that is overly apparent in Trump's twitter feed and, even, in his public speeches. The universities, then, are also seen as protectors of the liberal ideas of equality and a rejection of their philosophies/ideologies creates a sense of *unreality* as all rational debate is shut down with the rageful shouts of Trump's proponents and the replacement of rational discourse with wild, conspiracy theories and claims that seek to rewrite our common understanding of our reality.

Unfortunately, Trump's rhetoric fits within a fascist discourse to which most of his proponents are willingly blind. A simple revision of the immigration facts that I have offered here should be enough to prove many of Trump's claims to be not only incorrect, but borderline preposterous (as are similar claims made by other fascists like Hitler in Germany, General Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez in El Salvador and, even, black metal artists like Varg Vikernes). However, those who believe these rhetoricians are either unwilling or incapable of rational debate due to their 'unreal' understanding of the world. This understanding has much to do with modernity and *how* we see the world. As I argue throughout this dissertation, Modernity, and with it Western thought, has engrained itself not only into our epistemologies and ideologies but also into our social-political understanding of our country, our world, and of ourselves. Our understanding of ourselves as modern (or even post-modern) beings carries with it the weight of Western metaphysics and our understanding of the 'world as picture'.

In this understanding, reality exists through man's own representation of the world. Therefore, reality itself is 'framed' for us within the context of Modernity and the world represented as picture. This makes it almost impossible to detach oneself

from its epistemologies or to free oneself completely from its thought (especially since one must *use* Western thought itself to battle against it, as the language used in this battle is inherent to the epistemologies that are born from it and propagated by it). This leaves us in a position, as ‘modern beings’, in which fighting against modern epistemologies seems a fruitless effort. With the failure of communism in the previous century, capitalism has solidified its power over the Western world and any country within its grasps (or dominated by its discourses). In many cases, it has done so with the spread of political ideologies (i.e., Democracy) and religious dogma (i.e., Christianity). El Salvador, in fact, is a great example of where these three ideologies have converged upon a people who were once completely outside of its grasps. Through the colonization of its people, their land and their thought, Modernity has turned El Salvador (with the helpful push of the United States) into a country of many contradictions – many of which I hope to illuminate in this work.

El Salvador, from the perspective of the Western world, is seen as ‘underdeveloped’ in that it has not yet met the established goals of development defined by the Western world (and promoted through ideas like Positivism). For many Salvadorans, however, these goals are not only alien but, in actuality, unrealistic in the short-term. Even in the long-term, though, the achieving of these goals would only prove to solidify the imposition of Modernity on Salvadoran society, thus making it even more impossible for them to escape it.

While many Salvadorans, in their desire to be more like Europe or the United States, welcome such development, there are many, like the remaining indigenous, and even the members of gangs like the MS13, that recognize that this development would, at least, marginalize them even further, but, at worst, practically call for their total elimination – as is seen with the contemporary death squads. Since, as Peter

Sloterdijk explains, the fall of communism has left political revolution as a practical impossibility, there is little that these groups can do to bring about any real socio-political change to free themselves from the binds that they find themselves in. As a rage group that disagrees with many aspects of Modernity (i.e., Christianity, Democracy, Capitalism, etc.), the heavy metal community in El Salvador seeks for a means, like the indigenous and even the gang member, to undo these discourses (in many senses) and, in different ways and for different reasons, to either replace or restructure their socio-political reality within local discourses that either free them from such or at least lessen the burden.

I first came into contact with the heavy metal community in El Salvador through a series of coincidences in 2014. When I found out that El Salvador had a metal community and hosted a Metalfest that dated back to the civil war period, I knew that it was something that should be studied and, as a metalhead myself, something that I wanted to understand. I had many questions to answer. Why would a seemingly European/North American phenomenon like heavy metal be popular in El Salvador? What is it that heavy metal can offer the local community that makes it so attractive? What is it that makes heavy metal a discourse that can translate across national socio-political boundaries and lends it the capability and flexibility to be shaped to both international and local discourses? To answer these questions, I set about the task of learning the history of the movement from local musicians, promoters and producers. But more importantly, I attempted to engrain myself within the community in order to better understand it. Through this ‘engraining’, I eventually pin-pointed what I call a “Philosophy of Life” that runs through different genres of heavy metal and lends the discourse said flexibility and translatability that allows it to do what it does.

As with any anthropological work, however, it was easy to fall into common snares and traps. On the one hand, the proximity needed in order to really understand the community was achieved through the formation of friendships and professional relationships that, in the end, won me the respect of many in the community and solidified my place within it. On the other hand, my position as an eternal outsider and, unavoidably a ‘meddling American’, makes it virtually impossible to become fully engrained – especially since, no matter how close I am to the community or how much Salvadoran culture has influenced my life and upbringing, I can never truly call myself Salvadoran nor fully understand what it means to ‘be Salvadoran’, as I was not raised within the society nor within the nation’s borders.

Therefore, this study, no matter how much I try to fight it, approximates an ethnography of the Salvadoran metalhead in that it transforms them from individual actors into my anthropological subject – in other words, they, them... the Salvadoran metalheads. This also, in essence, excludes me, as a white American, from this ‘they’. While I attempt to minimize this difference, my work here is ultimately limited by my experiences and the experience of those with whom I have had interactions. Therefore, this work cannot be seen as an “all-inclusive” – or anywhere near approximating a – defining of the culture or community as a whole.

This work, instead, is an amalgam of shared experiences upon which I have based my deductions and my arguments. That being said, to the point which it is conceded me by academia and the community, I consider myself to be a part of this brother-and-sisterhood that I call Salvadoran metal. While walking the line between friend and academic observer has not been easy, it has been heartily enjoyable and rewarding. I am utterly thankful for the love, respect and honor that I have received as a part of this community that did not have to open its doors to me but did anyway. I

hope that this work, even with some of its harshest criticisms, lives up to its desired potential and, somehow, helps to make this community better known and understood.

Introduction

Heavy Metal as Musical Discourse

Since its rise to popularity in the early 1980s, heavy metal has been largely known as a strictly North American and European phenomena. The largest ‘powerhouse’ bands like Metallica, Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, and Slayer seemed to always come from one side of the pond or the other. In fact, this western duality practically dominated the musical scene until the international success of the album titled “Chaos A.D.” by Brazilian metal band, Sepultura, in 1993. The band, which had been playing since 1986, was the first Latin American band to reach international recognition. At the time, with the recent advent of nu metal spreading across the United States (heavily influenced by this album in particular), more and more metalheads were becoming aware that the influence of their music was being carried far beyond their own borders.

It should not be surprising, then, that early scholarship on the phenomena of heavy metal proved to be short-sighted in many ways. In Deena Weinstein’s work, Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology, the claim is made that, “the stereotypical metal fan is male, white, and in his midteens... most are also blue collar, either in fact or by sentimental attachment... these characteristics form a consistent pattern across geographical settings, although the Japanese and some Latin American fans could not be designated as ‘white’”³. This study, published in 1991, makes bold claims as to the existence of a “Heavy Metal code”, which seems to only exist in the mind of the author. This supposed “code” then leads her to write, “the advice to those aspiring to

³ Weinstein, 99.

be heavy metal artists, if they are physically infirm or misshapen, not youthful, people of color, or women is ‘Abandon all hope!’”⁴

What then could be said about Vicente “Chente” Sibrián? Confined to a wheelchair since his childhood, Chente decided to pursue his love of rock music despite the admonitions of others that he would not be able to do so. Paralyzed from the waist down and with limited control of his upper body, Chente learned to play the guitar while it lay horizontally across the arm rests of his wheelchair. He then went on to form the Salvadoran rock ‘supergroup’ Broncco. Unknown to him at the time, Broncco would strike wide popularity in the country in the late 1980s and become, arguably, the most famous hard rock/power metal band to ever exist in El Salvador. Chente himself became a cornerstone of the metal community that would follow his band’s success. He currently appears on multiple radio shows and is present at almost every concert in the capital area. His contribution to both the music scene and to the inspiration of youth in the country has earned him recognition as “Notable Artista de El Salvador” [Notable Artist in El Salvador] from the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador in June of 2011.

According to Weinstein’s admonition, there is no place in the metal community for an aging, disabled, wheelchair-bound Salvadoran who sings power metal in the Spanish language. Basing her study on the ‘glam rock’ bands of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the United States, Weinstein came to the conclusion that, “the heavy metal performer must translate the powerful, loud, and highly energetic music into his body movements and facial expressions. He must be acrobatically graceful enough to jump, leap, and generally bound about the stage.”⁵ This short-

⁴ Weinstein, 64.

⁵ Weinstein, 63.

sightedness in terms of *who* can contribute to the creation of heavy metal music, however, is only one of many. Weinstein, along with other authors, tended to pit the ‘proud pariah’ metalhead against what she calls, ‘respectable society’. This supposed dynamic contributes to the overall stigma that heavy metal fans cannot be productive members of society (or at the least that they choose not to be).

What then could be said about a Supreme Court Clerk and entrepreneur who is also the drummer for the popular Salvadoran death metal band Heresies? Such is the case of Giovanni Rosales, owner of SinSo Loft⁶ in San Salvador. The business offers sound-proof rooms for band practice, mainly because there are not many places in the capital where one can practice loud music without trouble from neighbors and law enforcement. In addition, the Loft was turned into a live music venue and bar that hosts tribute bands (possibly the only real way to make any money from music in El Salvador) on an almost weekly basis. Giovanni, apart from owning and running the bar, works at the Supreme Court of El Salvador as a Court Clerk and raises two children with his wife. In addition, he plays in tribute bands on a frequent basis and continues to play with Heresies, with their singer Olga Castro, at national festivals and smaller shows. While it would be a mistake to attempt to assert that all members of the community are as hard-working and productive as Giovanni, the fact that most metal musicians (and fans) must work normal jobs in order to continue playing music points to the fact that Weinstein, amongst other academics and critics, are not as familiar with the scene as they purport to be.

In fact, the reality of the Salvadoran metal community provides for much insight into the myopic generalizations and observations about heavy metal and even

⁶ SinSo Loft was once a small heavy metal bar called “Sin Sonido” [Without Sound]. The bar was upgraded to a new name and a new location in a ‘nicer’, upper-class neighborhood but has recently shut down due to the high operational costs and the dwindling support of local metalheads (amongst other reasons).

El Salvador itself. The country, widely known as a tropical Central American, “Third World” Republic, seemingly filled with agriculture and *ranchera*⁷ music, hosts a large urbanized population that not only produces its own highly competent music and art but also participates in an international collaboration of artists, producers, promoters, writers and more. Within the capital, almost all genres of international music can be found. From Ska to Punk, Blues to Jazz, and Cumbia to Salsa, almost everything is present. However, looking at promotional material about the country, travel advertisements and even some academic writing, it would appear that the majority of El Salvador consists of mystic landscapes and colonial churches mixed with a population of rural artists who continue on local traditions as if time had stopped. While the latter definitely exists and brings a lot of charm to tourism in the area, the metal community (amongst other contemporary movements) is often completely over-looked. So over-looked, in fact, that when made aware of its existence and the fact that it has existed for over twenty years, many visitors and academics are shocked – to say the least.

It is in this space, between the shock of this discovery in a country where it is not to be expected and the intrigue as to what this phenomena could have to offer us as academics, that I have pursued my study. The fact that the Salvadoran heavy metal community has yet to be studied, the closest thing to it possibly being the work Heavy Metal Islam by Mark LeVine on the regional scene in the Middle East, confirms that there is much that can be said about it. However, what is it that we wish to know? What can this particular phenomena add to our knowledge of the area and its population? I believe that the Salvadoran heavy metal community speaks to a *vacío*,

⁷ *Ranchera* music is a traditional music of Mexico that was popularized in the image of the mariachi but was then exported to neighboring Central American countries, like El Salvador. While popular in rural areas, the misguided attribution of this music to the country as a whole exemplifies the issue at hand.

or an empty-space, in our cultural studies of the region. The rapid urbanization of El Salvador in the second half of the twentieth century, the end of a brutal civil war, the failure of the resulting Peace Accords, the continued presence of indigenous communities, the rise of the Salvadoran street gang, political and social repression and the mass emigration of its citizenry are all contributing factors to the production of heavy metal within the country. While all of these issues have been studied from many different angles, the heavy metal community allows us to see how the Salvadoran population digests and then expels these vast changes and pressures in the form of musical expression.

Of course, the criticism could be made that heavy metal has nothing to offer. It is a 'base' or 'low-brow' form of expression. Even if that be the case, however, the fact that the Salvadoran metal community exports its products to the surrounding countries (and even as far as the US and Europe), and imports foreign productions and artists, demonstrates that the music and its artists are often the representatives of the country and its culture to those outside of its borders. One perfect example is Rodrigo "Fatality" Artiga, a Salvadoran artist (front man of the band Kabak) who moved on to play in the Helsinki metal scene with his bands Kataplexia and Thrashgrinder. Despite his current geographic location, however, he still returns every year to San Salvador to sing in the local Metalfest. A mediator between two worlds, Rodrigo "Fatality" offers us great insight into what makes the Salvadoran scene different from the European scene and how large of a difference there is between two cultures that are united solely by their love of the same music.

In fact, apart from the general observation that music enters and leaves the country freely (especially since the advent of YouTube), it is my argument that it is actually the music itself that creates what Robert Walser calls, "a popular musical

discourse.” It is this discourse, and the smaller discourses resulting from it, that allows the music to cross borders and cultures, being both produced and consumed throughout the world, oftentimes in some of the most unexpected places. But what do we mean exactly by a “musical discourse”? Simply put, “musical discourses [are] coherent systems of signification... Genres such as heavy metal are sites where seemingly stable discourses temporarily organize the exchange of meanings”⁸. These “exchange of meanings”, then, are what allow these discourses, like literary discourses, to “constantly cross national boundaries and revise cultural boundaries”⁹ – the specific phenomena which will be most important to this study.

The mistake here would be to believe that there is one, singular overarching discourse labeled “heavy metal”. While the label itself may be used to generalize a certain type of music, lifestyle and/or philosophy, the truth is that in the ‘90s – with the invention of thrash metal, black metal and death metal – the heavy metal scene slowly splintered and fractured into a host of genres and sub-genres that are almost too numerous to count today. However, within all of these genres, it could be argued that there are general themes that are always touched upon. While one fan may be more moved to listen to black metal for its satanic messages or its free-style form of musical production and another fan may be moved towards thrash metal due to its affinity for the punk lifestyle or the lesser need to become a virtuoso on an instrument, both fans consider themselves metalheads and contribute to a community that binds together during festivals and concerts, regardless of their personal tastes. While “elitist” fans definitely exist (those who claim that one genre is the “end-all/be-all” of

⁸ Walser, 33.

⁹ Walser, 33.

metal), the general consensus is “I am a metalhead. You are a metalhead. We have a lot of common ground.”

This common ground, I argue, is due to the existence of the previously mentioned ‘popular musical discourses’. Nonetheless, it is important to understand, that, much like the fracturing of heavy metal, these ‘discourses’ are diverse and vary depending upon many different factors. For the sake of making the thesis more comprehensible, I will focus on the dichotomy between international and national discourses. The space between these two, I believe, allows for the richest understanding of how the discourses become local and how they benefit the local community by doing so.

There are, then, “popular musical discourses” that we could designate as international discourses. These being the specific genres of metal which contain their own systems of signification that are usually different from one another across genres but similar to each other regardless of the geographical location where they are produced. A good example of this type of discourse would be the existence of black metal, which originated in Norway, but is present in El Salvador and shares common themes regarding Satanism, disdain for Christianity, a longing for past traditions (the Viking in Scandinavia vs. the Mayan in El Salvador) and a disgust for contemporary politics and society. However, the second type of discourse, which will prove much more fruitful, is the national discourse that is created when these international discourses are made regional and re-interpreted for the local population. We, then, have a meta-discourse, i.e. heavy metal, that is re-examined and re-produced within a local context, i.e. Salvadoran heavy metal. This term, then, does not only refer to the fact that the heavy metal is produced in El Salvador but that the resulting discourse is

something specific to El Salvador, a fact that is easily brought to light with a look into the topics explored by the songs and the lyrical production of such.

These local discourses, mixed with regional cultural phenomenon, will be the main focus of the thesis. However, the meta-discourse that will guide the entire investigation is the fact that, while believed to be otherwise, heavy metal is itself a life-affirming philosophy. Although the lyrics may focus on the more negative aspects of our existence (death, destruction, mayhem), there is an over-arching “Philosophy of Life” within the music that attempts to show that life is worth living and that, within us all, there is the power to overcome and to continue on. This philosophy can be found in the lyrics but also in magazines, fanzines, interviews, concert footage and even general conversation within the metal community, regardless of the geographical space where it is being spoken.

Heavy metal has often been understood by its fans to be a ‘liberating’ experience. In post-revolutionary societies like El Salvador, where violence is still an everyday occurrence and there is a general consensus that there is little hope for change, the cathartic experience of a metal concert is often ‘just what the doctor ordered’. Slam-dancing, moshing, crowd-surfing, screaming, etc. are all manners of releasing ones negative energy in a positive way. However, the music itself does much more than create a space for a renewed Dionysian festival (even though this forms a part of the effect), but instead attempts to communicate a message of “opening one’s eyes” or “raising their conscious” above what they see every day or above what they are told. Songs written with strong, vulgar lyrics have the effect of

‘jerking’ one out of complacency and, hopefully, getting them to think. Popular Brazilian-led band Soulfly’s¹⁰ hit “Jumpdafuckup”, announces,

Walking in da streets and looking at all this shit,
I’m full of hate, don’t fuck with me.
Walking in da streets and looking at all this shit,
Open up your eyes and fucking see.
We got the tribe against society,
We got to fight the real enemy,
Get da fuck up, stand da fuck up, back da fuck up.¹¹

This meta-discourse is a common ‘call to arms’ found in the metal community. While the music does not ask for a physical, social revolt, it rather asks for a revolution of conscious – a change in the way that we see and interact with society.

While it could be argued that these lyrics are negative in nature, if one looks closer, they will see the words of someone frustrated with the world around them. This frustration comes from a desire for things to be better – a life-affirming desire to ‘make the world a better place’. It is in this space, within heavy metal music (although not true for all heavy metal music), that I have identified what I call a “Philosophy of Life”. It is a philosophy that views the world differently and looks for alternate answers to those that are commonly spread through political channels and popular culture (the two main currents of thought with which heavy metal has the largest disagreement). It is this “Philosophy of Life” that is apparent in Salvadoran heavy metal and is a guiding principle of the minor discourses that we find in it. It is a philosophy that speaks of personal freedom above all else, the personal responsibility to educate and liberate oneself from dispensed knowledge, the recognition that life is

¹⁰ The Sepultura/Soulfly conflict is one of the largest and most talked about band break ups in heavy metal. The original members of Sepultura (Max Cavalera, Igor Cavalera and Andrés Kisser) had a falling out which left Max and Igor outside of the band and Andrés Kisser with the name and songs. Max and Igor then went on to create the band Soulfly yet still play Sepultura songs live. The animosity between the three is a very popular (yet taboo) subject in the metal world – almost as big as the break-up of Pantera.

¹¹ “Jumpdafuckup” lyrics, *DarkLyrics.com*.

worth living even with all of its negative aspects and that the exploration of these negative aspects (death, suicide, genocide, violence, etc.) is not a confirmation of them but a means of better understanding humankind's "Being-in-the-world". It is for this reason that "Heavy Metal as a Philosophy of Life" is the subtitle of the thesis and concurrently the guiding principle of the work. To understand this philosophy, however, it is pertinent to first understand the origins of the Salvadoran metal scene.

A Brief History of Salvadoran Metal

The heavy metal movement in El Salvador started, like most metal movements, with hard rock bands (also known as power or hair metal bands) that followed the quick rise to popularity of bands like Poison, White Snake and Mötley Crüe. These bands developed the formative years of heavy metal with their "Rockstar" attitudes and lavish, hedonistic lifestyles. After the community as a whole realized that lyrically and philosophically these bands had little to offer the listener, metalheads developed darker, heavier and faster genres of metal like thrash, death and black metal. In El Salvador, this same lineage holds true and is focused around the persona of Vicente "Chente" Sibrian, the founder of one of the oldest hard rock bands in Central America.

The band, Broncco, started out under the name, Thorns, on November 2nd, 1968. Chente Sibrian led the band from his position as guitar player. Suffering from poliomyelitis as a child, Chente is bound to a wheelchair due to the partial paralysis of his body. As previously mentioned, he learned how to play the guitar while it lay vertically across the armrests of his wheelchair. In his own words, Chente explains that,

Aquí en el país funcionamos como bandas que luchan contra todo, contra la corriente. Fundamos el grupo nuestro con el nombre de "Thorns" un dos de noviembre de 1968 y poco a poco hubo una

evolución y cambiamos nombre. Lo cambiamos a Broncco de El Salvador, y tenemos más de los 47 años de estar funcionando.

[Here in the country we function as bands that fight against everything, against the current. We founded our group under the name “Thorns” on the 2nd of November of 1968 and little-by-little there was an evolution and we changed names. We changed it to “Broncco of El Salvador” and we have over 47 years functioning as such.]¹²

Not only was the band the first hard rock band in El Salvador, it was also, to my knowledge, the first local rock band to attempt writing and singing some songs in English, only to later revert back to their native Spanish. For the band, the choice between singing in English and Spanish was a difficult one, as it still is today. Edwin Marinero, show promoter and previous roadie for Broncco, explains that,

Ese dilema de cantar en inglés para las bandas es porque, supuestamente... que les iba a dar apertura a nivel de otros países. Nunca se dio. Entonces, los resultados no son esos. Hay muchas bandas, sobre todo en Europa, que cantan en inglés pero porque es su segundo idioma. Pero, creo yo de que, más que todo fue que porque para el vocalista se le hacía más fácil cantar en inglés y se le hacía más difícil cantar en español. Y al final, al final, al nivel local las que han cantado en español han triunfado más en su país. O sea, por lo menos, los seguidores cantan sus temas normalmente y eso hace que el músico y el fan canten en una sola voz y eso les motiva más a las bandas pues cantar en su propia idioma.

[The dilemma for the bands to sing in English is because... it would give them a platform to reach the level of other countries. That never happened. So, the results were never there. There are many bands, especially in Europe, that sing in English but it is because it is their second language. But I believe that that is because it was easier for the vocalist to sing in English and it was more difficult to sing in Spanish. And in the end, in the end, on a local level those bands that sang in Spanish have triumphed more in their countries. Or, at least, their followers sing their lyrics normally and that makes it so that the music and the fans can sing in one voice and that motivates the bands more to sing in their own language.]¹³

Chente echoes this sentiment when talking about his decision to sing in English or Spanish at the beginning of his career with Broncco. He says that,

¹² Interview with Vicente “Chente” Sibrian. *All translations from Spanish to English are my own.*

¹³ Interview with Edwin Marinero.

A mí me parece que al principio nos pareció que no había que cantar en español porque no era tan ... en el lenguaje [inglés] es tan fácil decir 'Okay', 'All Right', 'Oh yeah', pero no 'Vaya, está bien', 'Vaya pues', 'Como no'. Entonces, consideramos que el idioma no era muy adaptable. Pero comprendimos después que teníamos que hacerlo en español, en nuestro idioma, y fue difícil.

[It seems to me that, at the beginning, we thought that we should not sing in Spanish because it was so... in the [English] language it is so easy to say 'Okay', 'All Right', 'Oh yeah' but not 'Vaya, está bien,' 'Vaya pues', 'Como no'. So, we considered the language to not be adaptable. But we later understood that we had to do it in Spanish, in our language, and it was difficult.]¹⁴

Decisions like this one, along with paving the road for concert venues, promotion and a general industry-like apparatus in the country can all be attributed to the members of Broncco and the team that supported them. Through the '70s and '80s, Broncco is the only local hard rock band that seems to have survived until today. And this says a lot as the band continued to play throughout the Salvadoran Civil War (1980 – 1992) when it was dangerous to be a “rocker” or “metalhead”.

Like most Salvadorans who lived through the civil war, local fan and metal connoisseur, Francisco “Chele Dismember” Villalta, remembers the problems that the conflict posed for the local metal community,

Cuando estaba lo de la guerra allí, casi por la '88, '89, tenía amigos que eran mayores y andaban de pelo largo y si te agarraba la guardia, te cortaba el pelo y con cuchillo, no con tijerita, verdad... incluso te golpeaban y después te preguntaban el nombre, verdad... La violencia que se vivía en esa época era diferente a la violencia en que estamos ahorita, verdad. Pero en aquella época, sí era bien represivo todo porque no podías andar tan abiertamente como puedes ahora con el pelo largo, los jeans rotos... tal vez por mirarte diferente ya eres objeto o sujeto de represión.

[When the war was happening around '88, '89, I had older friends that had long hair and if the *guardia*¹⁵ caught you, they would cut your hair and with a knife not with little scissors, right... including they beat you up and afterwards they would ask you your name, right.... The violence

¹⁴ Interview with Vicente “Chente” Sibrian.

¹⁵ *Guardia* here refers to the *guardia nacional* [National Guard] that perpetrated the repression during the civil war due to their status as the local/national military force. The *guardia nacional* was disbanded as part of the Peace Accords of 1992.

that we lived through in those days is different than the violence that we live in now, right. But at that time, yeah, everything was really repressive because you couldn't walk around so openly as you can now with long hair, ripped jeans... maybe, because they see that you are different, you are immediately an object or subject of repression.]]¹⁶

Iosif Najarro, drummer for the death metal band, Conceived by Hate, reflects these sentiments about the civil war and the metal scene,

Llegaban las personas a los conciertos y estaba, por ejemplo, la policía nacional llegaba y lo veían con pelo largo y se lo cortaban o incluso hubieron eventos de que hasta dispararon y todo entonces, era muy difícil. Sí, había una escena pero era más restringida por la misma situación.

[People came to the concerts and there was, for example, the national police would arrive and they would see them with long hair and they would cut it or there were even events where they would shoot off rounds and everything, so it was very difficult. Yes, there was a metal scene but it was more restricted due to the same situation.]]¹⁷

During the armed conflict, and even somewhat before it, having long hair, or dressing in a 'socially unacceptable' manner, meant drawing attention to oneself as a possible threat to the social order and, by extension, the military-backed government. Dress and musical taste could automatically bring someone under the suspicion of local authorities and could have drastic consequences (including having their hair cut with scissors or machetes, being beaten by local law enforcement or military officials or even being 'disappeared'). This was not only because of a distaste for the 'abnormal' appearance of metalheads but mainly due to an association between long hair and status as a socialist or 'leftist'. For many Salvadorans who were fans of heavy metal, this was an extremely difficult time. Concerts were shut down mid-set, concert goers were harassed both inside and outside of venues and a general fear of oppression and/or reprisal permeated the scene. However, this did not stop local fans of the music

¹⁶ Interview with Francisco "Chele Dismember" Villalta.

¹⁷ Interview with Iosif Najarro.

from wanting to create their very own scene and taking the steps to do so. With the work of local promoters during the war, the metal scene was kept barely alive, but it was another part of the scene that ended up solidifying the presence of heavy metal in El Salvador.

This second piece to the foundation of the scene was the formation of the El Salvador “Rocker’s Club” which opened officially with its first concert at the University of El Salvador on December 20th, 1992. The club, made up of a group of rock fans and university students, was formed with the intention of creating an entity that would help shape a community of musicians, fans and promoters into a local musical scene. Their first efforts were to stage concerts (the base of almost all musical endeavor – the live performance) and then to support those concerts through radio programming, advertising and word-of-mouth. The club, founded by Edwin Marinero and some of his university colleagues, quickly grew in number and began staging concerts. The history of the club however, is best told directly by Edwin himself:

Primero fue, después de que salimos de unos intramuros, de hecho de la colonia Escalón, una de las colonias más pudientes del país, en aquella época, estoy hablando de hace 23 años, 25 años... Existían las bandas, habían ciertos seguidores, habían unas bandas emergentes de metal más extremo, porque Broncco era hard rock. Y de repente dije yo con el otro compañero, “Mira, hagamos una convocatoria. Hagamos un club de roqueros y armemos un concierto.”... Y si [alguien] quiere participar, llega a tal lugar. Era una zona de comedores en Metrocentro¹⁸. Allí hicimos la primera convocatoria y ciertamente tampoco imaginamos la cantidad de gente que iban a llegar de diferentes sectores: Chalatenango, Zacatecoluca, de los municipios, y hasta la fecha de los municipios proviene como la fuerza, la fuerza de la escena, como que la gente en la capital ciertamente llega al evento pero de repente se queda como que, ‘Hay, no, vamos a esperar los internacionales y se despliega. Pero la fuerza, el corriente, la vida se le da la gente de los departamentos alrededor de San Salvador... Planificamos montar el club, hicimos unas solicitudes donde mediamos la capacidad de pensamiento que tenían estas personas porque nuestra idea era de no agarrar cualquiera, o sea, no era de convocar, o reunámonos y jodamos. Si no, que ya era una

¹⁸ Metrocentro is a famous outdoor/indoor shopping mall in San Salvador, located on Boulevard de los Heroes a few kilometers from the Mágico Gonzalez National Stadium.

cuestión más de carácter, verdad, de saber que que era el roquero en ese momento, que pensaba de política, que pensaba de religión, que pensaba de la ecología, que pensaba de las drogas, y así hicimos una encuesta y se ingresaban. Y no es que nosotros, por medio de la encuesta, podíamos desechar o integrarlo, si no [se trataba de] saber el grado de pensamiento que tenía esa persona, va.

[First it was, after we had finished some intramurals, in fact in Colonia Escalón, one the most powerful *colonias*¹⁹ in the country, at that time, I'm talking about 23 years, 25 years ago... Bands existed, there were a few followers, there were some emerging extreme metal bands, because Broncco was hard rock. And, all of a sudden, I said to my other friend, "Look, let's call a meeting. We'll make a Rocker's club and we'll put on a concert"... And if [someone] wanted to participate, they would just show up. It was inside the food court area of Metrocentro. There we had the first meeting and we truthfully did not imagine the amount of people that were going to show up from different sectors: from Chalatenango, Zacatecoluca, from the municipalities, and, to this date, much of the strength comes from those municipalities, the strength of the scene, as if the people from the capital certainly come to the event but all of a sudden are like, 'Hey, no, let's wait for the international acts' and they disperse. But the strength, the current, the life is given by the people from the departments around San Salvador... We planned to create the club, we made a few questionnaires to measure the thought capacity of those people [that were interested] because our idea was to not just accept anybody, that is, not just to meet, get together and fuck around. But otherwise, that it was a question of character, right.]²⁰

With the creation of Rocker's Club El Salvador, heavy metal entered into what most metalheads in the country call a "golden age". During these years, metal promotion became mechanical and easy, concerts were frequent and drew large crowds and the scene itself was beginning to be taken very seriously by media outlets in the country. The golden age itself lasted, according to Edwin Marinero, from 1992 until 2001. During this time, the scene was centered around one specific venue, Fenastras, that would promote local heavy metal concerts on a regular basis. The venue was built by Norwegian businessmen and was, therefore, considered a premium location for the metal scene. Edwin explains,

¹⁹ *Colonias* are suburban developments that have names that distinguish them from one another both geographically and economically.

²⁰ Interview with Edwin Marinero.

Fenestras era una organización sindical, verdad, que el lugar era un brazo armado del partido que está en gobierno pero después se pelearon y... ellos tenían un local que lo habían hecho los noruegos o sea era un edificio pensado por gente de Europa. Un local, un sótano, dos camerinos, una sala de traductoras a los lados, una sala de proyección en frente, o sea, era un lugar adecuado para los conciertos.

[Fenestras was a union organization, right, and the place was an armed branch of the party that is currently in power in the government [the FMLN] but afterward they fought and... they had a venue that the Norwegians had made, that is, it was a building built by the mind of European people. There was the venue, a basement, two dressing rooms, a large room with speakers on the sides, a projection hall in front, that is, it was an adequate place for the concerts.]²¹

The location quickly became the home of the majority of Rocker's Club's events and to the local fan community. Many of the musicians that are today in bands still look back upon this time with fond memories and many of them first came into contact with the music and the scene at Fenestras. In fact, the majority of the successful, contemporary metal acts got their start during this time and now boast 10 to 15 years of continuous musical production. Former lead singer of local thrash metal act, Social SS (Sabotage Store)²², and current singer of CFD (Chaos from Death), Alex "Negro Centenario"²³ Palacios remembers the venue as a distinct starting point for his own career,

Había un lugar donde en las '90s fue bien popular, el auditorio donde Fenestras, verdad. Y vinieron unos terremotos que hubieron acá en el país en el 2001 fue que se cambia a un discoteca, porque los organizadores de estos conciertos locales no tenía adonde, verdad. Y se trasladan a un lugar llamado "La arena de lucha de El Salvador". Creo que fue la mejor época que viví yo como fan de las bandas; que las

²¹ Interview with Edwin Marinero.

²² Social SS often includes the "Sabotage Store" explanation of the abbreviation "SS" to distance themselves from any link to Nazism or other metal acts that indulge in the ties to that movement.

²³ Most musicians within the metal scene carry what are called *apodos*, or nicknames. Sometimes these nicknames are related to identifying characteristics of the individual (skin color, body shape, etc.) or of their background (where they are from, childhood stories, etc.). "El negro centenario" makes reference to Alex's darker skin complexion and the location where he lives/grew up, near "el parque centenario" (the Centennial Park). The use of 'negro' here, while referencing his darker skin color, is devoid of the racial meaning that it holds in other countries (specifically any reference to African descent) and is not meant in an offensive or demeaning manner. I have included these *apodos* with each individual's names as many of them are known better by their *apodos*.

bandas y toda esta escena del rock porque éramos llenos increíbles allá en San Jacinto. Eran 800, 1.200 personas por evento, casi que al mes, mes y medio.

[There was a very popular place in the '90s, the auditorium at Fenastras, right. And then the earthquakes happened here in the country in 2001 and it was turned into a nightclub, because the organizers of local concerts didn't have anywhere else, right²⁴. And we then moved to a place called 'La arena de lucha de El Salvador'²⁵. I believe that that was the best time that I lived as a fan of the bands; the bands and the whole rock scene was incredibly full there in San Jacinto²⁶. There were 800, 1,200 people per event, almost every month, month and a half.]²⁷

As Alex explains, the fact that the metal scene had a specific, central location for its concerts up until 2001 contributed to the success of the local concerts and the growth of the bands and the scene. However, the loss of this venue struck a blow to the scene. The short lived period at 'La Arena de lucha' from 2001 to 2006 never truly lived up to the events held at Fenastras and the scene slowly began to fracture. After the closing of this final venue, the metal scene has moved from venue-to-venue, year-to-year, which makes the promotion of concerts much more difficult. This problem, though, is not only specific to El Salvador.

On the international scene, the 1990s and early 2000s could also have been seen, in certain regards, as a 'golden age' for heavy metal. The arrival of nu metal acts, like Korn, Limp Bizkit and Linkin Park, brought heavy metal to the forefront of MTV music and, thus, to the forefront of youth culture. The nu metal movement was seen by many in the local and underground scenes as an annoying necessity. Most fans did not see the new movement as metal at all. With watered-down, melodic riffs

²⁴ This is meant in a sarcastic note. What Alex means is that there were plenty of places for mainstream music events, but that the local community acted as if appropriating Fenastras from the metal scene was essential to the survival of these events.

²⁵ "La arena de lucha de El Salvador" roughly translates to "the wrestling ring of El Salvador". The location was popular for hosting Wrestling (Lucha Libre) matches but also sponsored the heavy metal scene until 2006 when it was dispersed to random venues as it remains today.

²⁶ San Jacinto is a *colonia* on the outskirts of San Salvador, near Ilopango, that has today become an area plagued with gang violence.

²⁷ Interview with Alex "Negro Centenario" Palacios.

and distortion, emotive lyrics and specific dress and imagery, the movement seemed to be poking fun at heavy metal, at best, and appropriating it for mass culture, at worst. It wasn't until the early 2000s that these bands began to earn recognition from the metal scene as a whole. The reasoning behind this, in my opinion, is that the nu metal movement created a bridge between more popular rock music and heavier metal. Some fans would start with Korn and Limp Bizkit and, through them, learn of Iron Maiden, Slayer, Metallica and even death and black metal acts. Nu metal then served as a stepping stone to heavier metal and added some validity to the scene on an international level. This, however, was short-lived. Like most popular music, nu metal fell out of style with MTV and the commercial circuit in the later 2000s and has since joined the rest of heavy metal bands in semi-underground obscurity²⁸.

Nonetheless, after the fall of Fenestras and 'La Arena de lucha' and the fracturing of metal back into the underground, Rocker's Club El Salvador has uninterruptedly dominated the heavy metal scene in the country. Their main focus was and is the promotion of local/national metal acts. Like most national metal scenes, international acts always seem to pull a larger audience and to be taken more seriously, even in places far from their origins. Bands like Slayer and Iron Maiden can still fill stadiums in El Salvador and Guatemala but the national acts struggle for the same type of support. Part of this comes from the increased visibility of these bands and the ease of access to their music and merchandise, but the other part comes from the attitude that the local metal groups have little to offer or that, by being made and produced in Central America, they might be "lacking" in both originality and quality (especially when coupled with the continued designation of El Salvador as

²⁸ It is important to note here though that after the nu metal movement, heavy metal has since been added to popular music awards like the Grammy's as its own specific award – Best Metal Performance. For some, this is a sign of the music progressing towards more commercial recognition, for others it is an attempt to 'sell out' and become exactly what metalheads dislike.

In an attempt to continuously promote the local bands, Rocker's Club created the first national Fanzine, *Suplicio*. The short-lived fanzine offered information on local events, local bands, international metal acts, interviews with both national and international bands,

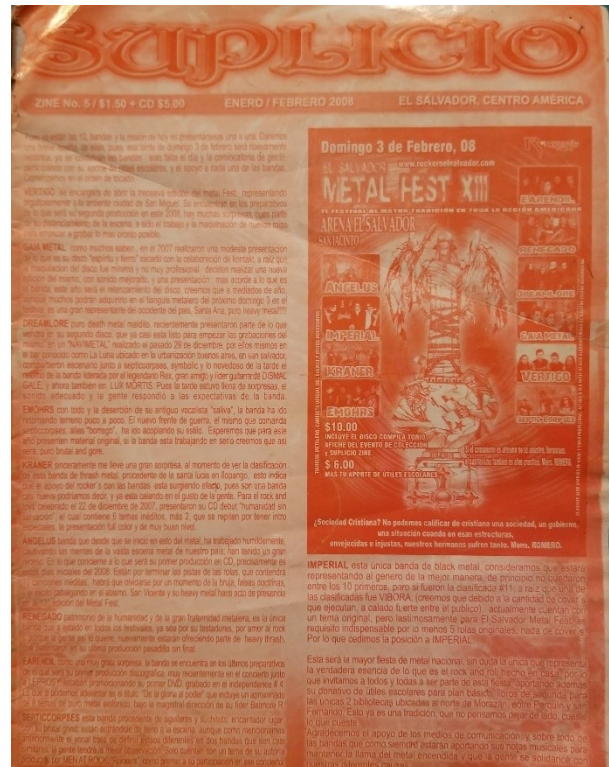


Figure 1

opinion columns, informational material on political movements (including historical biographies on Ché Guevara and other Latin American icons), local news and even a fan-produced ‘humor’ section. The goal of the fanzine was to keep the community informed of local, regional and international metal news and to provide a space for interaction between fans, the club and bands. With the difficulty of production and distribution rising, the local fan base dwindling (and also the loss of founding member

Guillermo Hernández²⁹), and the rise of the internet as a more effective medium, the fanzine was abandoned (although copies still exist in circulation).

The most important contribution of Rocker's Club, however, was the third founding movement within the scene – the El Salvador Metalfest – which is now in its 23rd year. The festival features a lineup of strictly national metal acts³⁰ and offers music from a variety of different genres from within heavy metal. It is truly a spectacle to see the various ways in which the music is interpreted by different bands and how these bands have taken international musical discourses and made them their own. The bands are chosen throughout the year based upon their popularity in the scene, their availability, desire to play, successful filling out of questionnaires and voting on time slots. This year's 23rd Metalfest features 15 different bands ranging from black metal to operatic metal to thrash metal to tribal metal. It is, by far, one of the most anticipated festivals of the year in El Salvador and a major player in the establishment of the scene in the region – drawing visitors from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and even the United States and Canada.

El Salvador Metalfest not only shows the power that the scene has in drawing crowds but also shows the interest of local media outlets in the scene. The presence of television crews and live, on-site interviews during the concert goes to show that the metal scene has moved from an underground movement into a completely legit and valid concert promotion system. The continued arrival of international acts year-

²⁹ Guillermo “Guillermetal” Hernández was a member of Rocker's Club, a radio personality, an editor of the *Suplicio* fanzine and a cornerstone of the metal community. Unfortunately, Guillermo died abruptly on August 15th, 2013 from a sudden hemorrhage in his stomach. He is remembered fondly by the community and is mentioned again in the conclusion of this thesis.

³⁰ El Salvador Metalfest is so strictly local that an attempt to bring Mexican hardcore/metal band, Thell Barrio, to the stage in 2017 was quickly shut down by the local community under the excuse that the band's iconography and ‘cholo’-style of dress too closely mimicked the Salvadoran street gangs. The real reason, I found from most of the people surrounding the event, was that most of the public and promoters wanted the festival to remain purely local and thus relegates international acts to other events.

round, recently including Slayer and Iron Maiden, also demonstrates the weight of the metalhead population and the draw that the scene has been able to build since the end of the civil war. Local bands continue to crop up at an alarming rate (faster than all of the neighboring countries) and, according to the Encyclopaedia Metallum, the country boasts 140 registered bands³¹. Figure 2 shows that the country hosts 22 bands per 1 million habitants, placing it #2 in Central America (behind Costa Rica) and #11 in Latin America as a whole³².

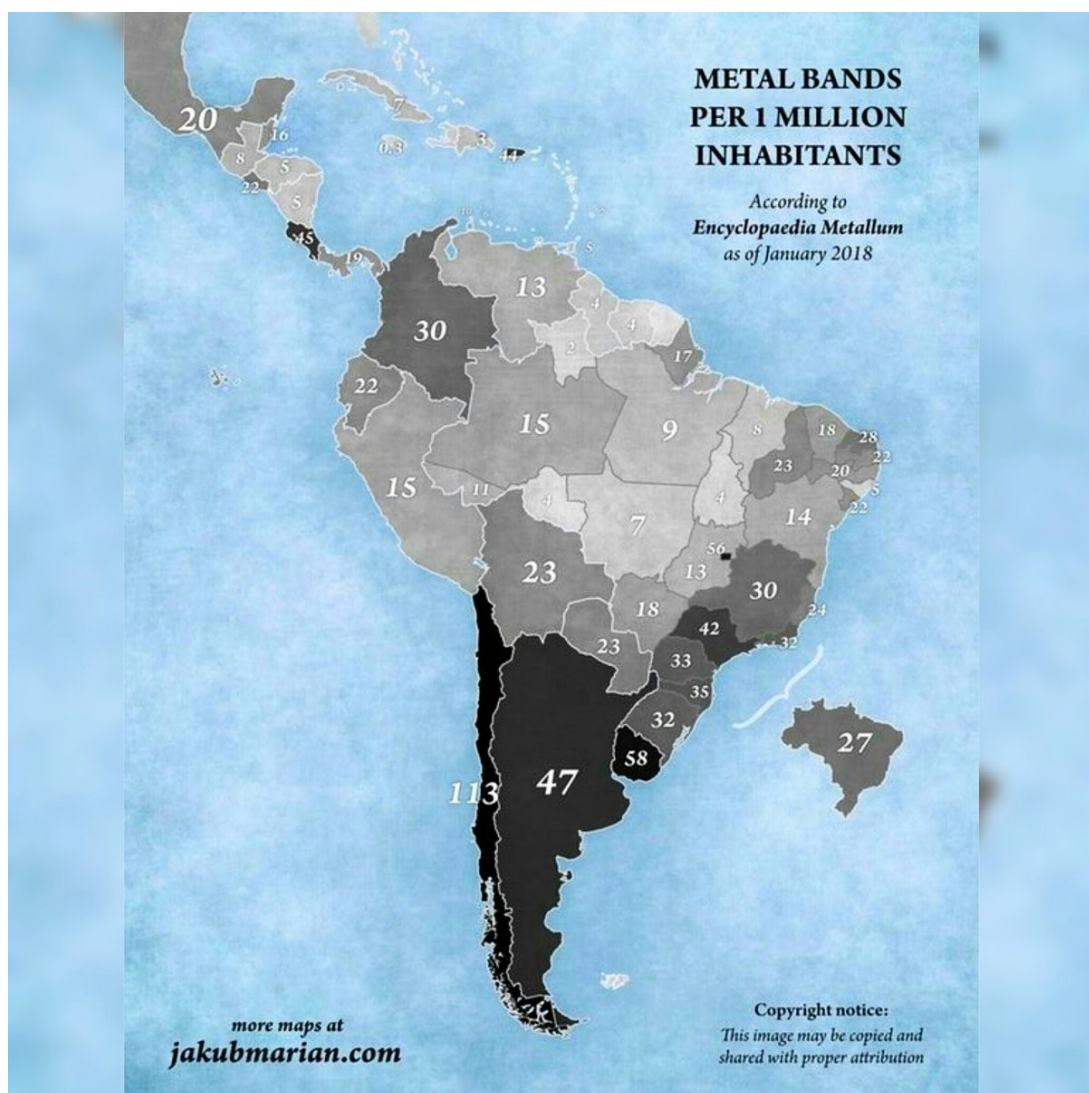


Figure 2

³¹ This number includes all active, non-active and since disbanded groups.

³² Marian does not give an explanation why Brazil is split up between its states, instead of by country, but it is my suspicion that it is due to the large size of the country and its ecological and social diversity.

Thanks to the efforts of people like Chente Sibrian and Edwin Marinero and his Rocker's Club, the scene has flourished since its inception in the early 70s, its struggle through the civil war, its brief "Golden Age" in the 90s and is still fighting to produce continued growth (including the crossing of borders by national acts, which has only been accomplished a handful of times³³).

Contemporarily speaking, though, young fans of heavy metal in El Salvador might feel as if they are living through a slump after the end of the 'golden age'. Internationally, heavy metal has fractured into continually smaller genres and communities that has, in effect, hindered the growth of the community into something bigger than it currently is. Nonetheless, with the arrival of technology like iTunes and YouTube to Central America, heavy metal bands and fans have gained access to a global community of exchange that far exceeds the regional reach that they had in the past. Bands in El Salvador can now make their music available online for their fans living across international borders and can reach out to record companies, other bands, and their fans with much more facility than any other time in the history of the movement. This fluidity of communication has helped to bring positive attention and a sense of validity to the metal community. As a result, many different media outlets have begun including a space for national (and international) metal music since the early 2000s.

On television, there are entire shows dedicated to heavy metal, like "Rock en Acción" [Rock in Action], led by Marco Tulio Aguilar Serrano, singer of Torniquete. The show, like many others in El Salvador, started on University television networks, had a run on local television and then was converted into radio/online programming.

³³ To my knowledge, the only three Salvadoran bands to play outside of the region are Virginia Clemm (Wacken Open Air, Germany 2011 and Northeastern US Tour 2015), Araña (Wacken Open Air, Germany 2015) and Conceived by Hate (European Tour 2016 and 2017).

The show included interviews with local bands and promoters, exposition of local music videos and conversations regarding the international metal scene as a whole. Much like “Radio Astral”, the local metal radio station, these shows proved to be unable to support the time format given them (i.e., their popularity did not justify their airtime) and many were ‘downgraded’ to online platforms. Nonetheless, the producers and promoters of these shows work tirelessly to create content for a metal community that still finds them to be a cornerstone of their movement.

Other shows, like “El Sótano” [the Basement], attempt to reach out to younger crowds by including popular music and culture in the programming. As part of this, local singer for the band Virginia Clemm, Jorge ‘Garga’ Moran Zelaya, hosts a 15-minute section, called “Aleación” [Alloy], that is dedicated solely to heavy metal music and culture. In his 15 minutes, Jorge (like many of his fellow media producers) tries to promote a ‘heavy metal culture’ that will help the local scene to grow and to distance itself from its image as a place for simple ‘drunken debauchery’. In fact, many of the bands that were created during the golden age of metal, together with the newer, ‘younger’ bands, have joined the fight to create and to develop a local culture that will fortify the scene against its current fragmentation, and in a sense, its weakening as a metal scene. This current fight, though, has more to do with the local socio-political climate than it does with the global crisis confronting heavy metal’s fracturing and inability to remain relevant.

Contemporary Salvadoran Society as a source of Rage

Fans of heavy metal in El Salvador often lovingly call their own country, Hell Salvador. It is a tongue-in-cheek manner of recognizing the harsh difficulties of the reality of life for many Salvadorans. Caught between corrupt politicians, a brutal police/military force and violent street gangs, the average Salvadoran has to fight off

violence as an everyday part of life. This widespread violence is nothing new to a country that has suffered through a devastating civil war. However, today's violence is a new, sporadic type of violence that is no longer connected to a political ideology or a movement to replace one political system for another. Instead, the violence is centered around survival, economic status and a general disillusionment that most share about the state of contemporary society. For the street gangs, this disillusionment has turned into 'terrorism' against the police and military forces in the country. For everyone else, physical, violent revolution is no longer a viable option. Heavy metal provides a space where the meta-discourse of 'violence', and the rage that accompanies it, can be filtered through both fantasy and intellectual thought towards a possible solution and, hopefully, towards a better life.

At the center of this contemporary violence are the Salvadoran street gangs, *la Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13)* and *los Dieciochos (18s)*. The gangs – both formed in Los Angeles, California and exported via mass deportation to Central America – are at the center of both media coverage and everyday life in El Salvador. The gangs perpetuate violence through internal 'beefs' within individual sects, war between the two gangs and, currently, a war on the police and military in El Salvador. A quick scan of media coverage inside the country shows an almost glorifyingly constant preoccupation with the violence. On a daily basis, bodies of gang members, police officers, soldiers and innocents are found in the streets. Since the formation of the gangs, this violence has had a steady ebb-and-flow. For times, peace treaties are met between the gangs and the government. But these treaties rarely last long before the violence starts up again and, many times, becomes worse than before the treaties.

Due to this inability to stop the perpetuation of gangland killings, the government recently decided to change its tactics and to confront the gang problem

head-on. After ending all treatise with the gangs, in August of 2015, the Supreme Court of El Salvador (La Sala de lo Constitucional de la Corte Suprema de Justicia) officially named the *pandillas* [gangs] as ‘terrorist groups’. The Supreme Court’s official declaration reads, “La Sala concluye que son grupos terroristas las pandillas denominadas Mara Salvatrucha o MS-13 y la pandilla (Barrio) 18 o Mara 18, y cualquier otra pandilla u organización criminal que busque arrogarse el ejercicio de las potestades pertenecientes al ámbito de la soberanía del Estado” [The Court declares as terrorist groups the Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 and the gang (Barrio) 18 o Mara 18, and any other gang or criminal organization that seeks to claim the exercise of the powers pertaining to the scope of the sovereignty of the State]³⁴.

This naming has a twofold effect. First, it placed the street gangs into the Western narrative of the “war on terror”. This narrative, in certain manners, attempts to circumvent Human Rights groups by placing the terrorist groups outside of the general public (i.e., common criminality) and allowing harsher, swifter justice to be pursued (i.e., less due process). This is in part because of the local government’s frustration with attempting to please Human Rights groups in their treatment of the street gangs and simultaneously fighting off extreme, sometimes inhuman acts of violence perpetrated by them³⁵. By placing them into this narrative, the Salvadoran government can, essentially, treat them differently than common criminals and enlist the help of the military (and also earn the sympathy and support of more ‘developed’ western nations). As terrorists, the street gangs lost all credibility as a group that is attempting to make any type of socio-political change (i.e., form a party).

³⁴ “Maras, declaradas ‘grupos terroristas’”, *El Nuevo Diario*.

³⁵ This is a theme that I discuss in detail in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Second, this naming confirms Peter Sloterdijk's thesis in his work, "Rage and Time", that, since the end of communism, there is no longer a space for organized, socio-political revolution via violence. Sloterdijk writes that,

In large parts of the Third World, if one wants to continue to use that term, just as in some countries of the former Second World, the outrageous circumstances appear to be in no way less dramatic than the situation of the English working class in the nineteenth century according to Friedrich Engels's daunting depiction. One is led to believe that the sum total of suffering, misery, and injustice on earth, which could potentially spark rage, would be enough for ten eruptions when compared to the situation in October 1917... In the East and in the West all that remains of the hopes of those who used to be revolutionaries, reformers, transformers of the world, and redeemers of classes are mere 'petrifications' – to call up a bizarre phrase of Heiner Müller, bizarre because hopes usually wither, not petrify," therefore, "Radicalism is only important in the Western Hemisphere as an aesthetic attitude, perhaps also as a philosophical habitus, but no longer as a political style.³⁶

While the street gangs are radical in their violence, they lack a political cohesion that would elevate them to the status of revolutionaries – a status that is largely desired by many *pandilleros* considering their ties via family to the guerilla movements of the civil war era.³⁷ The title of "terrorist", then, removes the possibility of this elevation to the position of groups like the former guerillas and places them on the 'wrong side' of the conflict. It also places the gangs, via association, into the league with groups like ISIS and the Taliban. Much like these groups, the gangs are made up of young, disenfranchised men who are angry at 'modern', contemporary society and – lacking a movement – lash out violently against the power structures. Sloterdijk explains that,

³⁶ Sloterdijk, 184-185.

³⁷ As mentioned in the prologue, the street gangs are often correctly linked to the mass emigration of former military and guerilla fighters at the end of the civil war to the United States. The credit for the creation of the gangs is often given to the sons of these men that ended up in Los Angeles and adapted their guerilla tactics to the established organized crime techniques of local gangs, like the Bloods and the Crips. For more information on the history of the gang, Thomas Ward's work, "Gangsters without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang", is an essential work. I discuss this work more in Chapter 1.

we are dealing with the same angry young men into whose double misery of unemployment and excess adrenaline the explosive insight into their social superfluity was added. It would be careless not to want to understand that they are potential recruits for any war, which provides them with a perspective for breaking out of the prison of their involuntary apathy.³⁸

While the reasons for their hatred of the government and society at large may be different than the reasons of groups like ISIS, the Salvadoran street gangs exist now within the same meta-narrative of terrorism. This provides an advantage to the Salvadoran government of waging a perpetual war against them and simultaneously justifies the popular reclamation for their eradication; for, as Sloterdijk reminds us, “the ‘war of terror’ possesses the ideal quality of not being able to be won – and thus never having to be ended.”³⁹

For the both the Salvadoran street gangs and the rest of Salvadoran society, this contemporary issue points to a void that Sloterdijk himself clearly delineates in his work. Without valid forms of socio-political revolution, people (and groups of people) are left with the rage that has always been felt but lack a means to obtain, and, by extension, the hopes of, a final solution. Sloterdijk expresses this sentiment by saying, “at this moment, there are no forms of positive apocalypse whose popularization would be capable of translating the potential collapse of currently successful social and economic systems into attractive visions for the time to come”⁴⁰. This hopelessness in the search for a solution can easily be seen reflected in meta-discourses within heavy metal that concern themselves with post-apocalyptic fantasies, violence and social reform.

³⁸ Sloterdijk, 208.

³⁹ Sloterdijk, 219.

⁴⁰ Sloterdijk, 204.

Thus, then, appears the logical question: “What does this have to do with music?” and especially, with heavy metal music. In essence, heavy metal music sees itself as a music that informs its public and attempts to educate them on ‘what is really going on’. Sometimes this is done through the lyrics of songs, but mainly it is done through the process of promoting the questioning of authoritative knowledge and the providing of a space for the catharsis of rage. While many outsiders see the music as ‘noise’ or nonsense, there is a Philosophy of Life at work which attempts to deal directly with contemporary socio-political problems, something that I explore in chapter one of this thesis. But, as ‘noise’, heavy metal points to the same void in society that Sloterdijk so lucidly describes. Jacques Attali reminds us that, “living in the void means admitting the constant potential for revolution, music and death... Truly revolutionary music is not music which expresses the revolution in words, but which speaks of it as a lack.”⁴¹

The lack of a space for both revolution and the outlet of rage contributes to the discourses of rebellion and irreverence in heavy metal. Instead of seeking violent revolution against the socio-political system (as do the *pandillas*), metalheads focus on the expanding of their own minds, increasing of knowledge, participation in socio-political events (voting, protesting, etc.) and the continued expression of their personal freedoms (even at the cost of those same freedoms). This fight, both internal and external, is informed by the music and by the Philosophy of Life that guides it. This very same philosophy, I argue, is what separates heavy metal from other contemporary popular music movements and is what has made it such a strong movement internationally and so easily adaptable locally. I feel, along with other metalheads, that other popular music lacks the ability to do what heavy metal attempts

⁴¹ Attali, 147.

to do – mainly because most popular music is used to reinforce popular social imaginings. Perhaps this sentiment is best described by Jacques Attali when he writes that,

In a society in which power is so abstract that it can no longer be seized, in which the worst threat people feel is solitude and not alienation, conformity to the norm becomes the pleasure of belonging, and the acceptance of powerlessness takes root in the comfort of repetition. The denunciation of ‘abnormal’ people and their usage as innovators is then a necessary phase in the emplacement of repetition. Although training and confinement are the heralds of repetition, confinement is no longer necessary after people have been successfully taught to take pleasure in the norm... thus music today is in many respects the monotonous herald of death. Ever since there have been musical groups in places where labor consists in dying, death and music have been an indissociable pair.⁴²

In order to promulgate this philosophy, heavy metal uses a mixture of international meta-discourses that are converted into local, micro-discourses. Therefore, for each chapter, I have chosen a title of a song from local Salvadoran bands that attempts to encapsulate the discourses being discussed. In chapter one of this thesis, “*Desfilando en la miseria: Heavy Metal as a Source of Empowerment and the Culture of ‘Valeverguismo’*”, I explain how the meta-discourses of personal and socio-political power are interpreted in heavy metal internationally and then in El Salvador and how subsequently they have been converted into the local phenomenon known as ‘valeverguismo’. In chapter two, “*Invocando las tinieblas: Hitler and Contemporary Death Squads*”, I explore the possible negative outcomes of the conversion of ‘dangerous’ meta-discourses, like Nazism, into local micro-discourses of extermination (i.e., genocide). Chapter three, “*Indigenas sangrando libertad: National Identity and the Phenomenon of Indigenismo*” deals with the micro-discourses of national identity and how these discourses have been provided a space by heavy metal

⁴² Attali, 125.

to explore the ancestral mayan-pipil past and to, thus, provide a stage for active social protest in favor of the local indigenous communities. The final chapter, “*Bestias Alcohólicas: Sex, Drugs and Social Rebellion*” focuses on the local interpretation of the Dionysian aspects of metal and their appearance in the scene’s exploration of vulgarity through the usage of pornographic imagery, vulgar language, homoeroticism and, ultimately, in wide-spread alcoholism. Throughout all of these chapters and discourses, it is my intention to illuminate the Philosophy of Life that exists underneath each specific issue and how heavy metal is unique in its ability to reach the masses despite its popular stigmatization as ‘underground’ and irrelevant ‘noise’.

Chapter 1

“Desfilando en la miseria”: Heavy Metal as a Source of Empowerment and the Culture of ‘Valeverguismo’

“Heavy metal revolves around identification with power,
intensity of experience, freedom, and community.”
- Robert Walser⁴³

As an “extreme” form of music, heavy metal has always been concerned with both the politics of power and the expression of power. In the lyrics of the music, socio-political power is always submitted to an incessant type of questioning and undermining. It is for this reason that the music has remained ‘underground’ and is generally respected as a ‘subversive’ music and culture. However, the obsession with power does not stop at a socio-political level. The idea of personal power (i.e., overcoming, becoming, transcending, etc.) is a central theme of the music and can be found both in its lyrics and performance around the globe. As far back as the 1980s hair metal bands, the expression of personal freedom as it regards sex, drugs and daily life has been a central point of the musical culture.

North American bands, like Pantera, are great examples of how this idea of personal empowerment became central to the music early on. Their album, *Vulgar Display of Power*, is littered with messages of personal empowerment and overcoming of obstacles – aside from the obvious reference in the title of the album itself. Songs like “Mouth for War” examine this overcoming through the use of will power,

⁴³ Walser, 53.

Revenge, I'm screaming revenge again
Wrong, I've been wrong for far too long
Been constantly so frustrated
I've moved mountains with less
When I channel my hate to productive
I don't find it hard to impress

Hold your mouth for the war
Use it for what it's for
Speak the truth about me
Determined

Possessed, I feel a conquering will down inside me
Strength, the strength of many to crush who might stop me
My strength is in number
And my soul lies in every one
The releasing of anger can better any medicine under the sun.⁴⁴

Common to this theme is the idea that suffering is unavoidable and that suffering should be turned into a positive force for the advancement of the self. This song in particular speaks to the use of will power in self-discipline when facing hardships or personal battles. The most interesting line, however, is the last one, “the releasing of anger can better any medicine under the sun”, as it mentions another important aspect of both the heavy metal community and its philosophy – that the cathartic act of releasing anger, be it through the production and playing of music at a live venue or simply jumping into a mosh pit, is part of the overcoming process that leads to richer personal empowerment.

In other words, a being who is consumed by anger cannot progress into a space of personal freedom over those things that plague their existence. In fact, this docile state of rage is what many metalheads would say is wrong with the world as a whole. Instead of acting out their rage through healthy means, people hold onto their rage as it slowly destroys them. For Pantera, and many others, the answer lies in

⁴⁴ Mouth for War lyrics, *Google*.

turning this rage into a personal (and even a socio-political) weapon that helps one to ‘rise above’ their situations and personal limitations.

At the core of this philosophy, of course, is the idea of ‘becoming your best self’. This ‘becoming’ is seen as a personal process that is interconnected with society and enhanced by heavy metal and its worldview. This philosophy and its resulting worldview are both based largely upon the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and the roots of his *Übermensch* in the Western psyche. Walter Kaufmann, on Nietzsche, explains that the idea of becoming, or of the perfecting of oneself, is rooted in the “will to power”. He writes, “the will to power is a striving that cannot be accurately described either as a will to affect others or as a will to ‘realize’ oneself; it is essentially a striving to transcend and perfect oneself”⁴⁵. He sums this up later by saying, “*Great power reveals itself in great self-mastery*”⁴⁶. In other words, the idea in heavy metal that the dominating of oneself through the determination of self-perfection, originates in the work of Nietzsche, whether the culture itself is aware of the phenomena or not.

This is not to say that heavy metal is unique in its utilization of Nietzschean themes. Of course, Nietzsche’s influence is so strong that it can be seen almost anywhere that the Western view of the world is dominate. However, what is important here is the recognition that the ideas of empowerment within heavy metal are dependent upon and rooted in Nietzsche’s philosophy. This allows us to understand that these are not ideas nor phenomena that have sprung forth from the ether unprovoked. Rather, they have been present in Western thought, society, politics, etc. for over a millennia and have only found new expression in contemporary popular music like heavy metal.

⁴⁵ Kaufmann, 248.

⁴⁶ Kaufmann, 251. (emphasis original)

Another aspect of power is the idea of Darwinism both in its scientific form and in the later form of Social Darwinism. The process of overcoming, both as an individual and as a society, is dependent upon what some would call ‘the culling of the herd’. In other words, weakness, of any kind, is looked upon as an illness that must be eradicated and strength (i.e., the strength to survive) is the ultimate goal of the human being. This can be seen in the metal world in its affinity for body-building, the ability to withstand violence in the mosh pit, its sometimes uber-masculinity (although, as we will see, these ideas transfer over to the feminine as well) and the idea that ‘brutality’ is a part of life that should not be avoided but embraced. Though most Social Darwinism is pointed at marginalized groups that are seen as ‘weak’ and as the propagators of the failure of society as a whole (as we can easily see in Hitler’s philosophy), the ideas here are *not* pointed towards a specific social group but at society as a whole and are introspective in that they include a self-evaluation of personal weaknesses and the means in which they can be overcome. Pantera’s song, “War Nerve”, expresses this sentiment in the opening lines,

Truly, fuck the world, for all it's worth, every inch of Planet Earth,
Fuck myself, don't leave me out, don't get involved, don't corner me,
Inside, ulcer, unjust bastards, file out face first,
Meet the lies and see what you are.⁴⁷

In this example, we can see with that, “fuck myself, don’t leave me out”, the individual is not *above* the rest of society but a part of the same. This idea implicates that if the individual is not capable of ‘overcoming’ or ‘becoming’ but gives into their own weaknesses, then they accept their own fate as part of the masses. An idea like this is what many would reference as ‘brutal’, an adjective used quite commonly in the heavy metal world, and is highly respected. This is partly due to the fact that such

⁴⁷ War Nerve lyrics, *Google*.

a ‘brutal’ philosophy *requires* introspection and a confrontation of those negative aspects of one’s own personal psyche – “meet the lies and see what you are”.

The reason that I have chosen Pantera as a prime example for the illuminating of this particular phenomena is that the band became a cornerstone of the heavy metal world when it was starting to wane in the late 1990s. Pantera’s ‘new style’ of metal and large stage shows helped to inspire the generation of musicians that currently play heavy metal and they continue to be admired throughout the metal world (except for in elite groups of specific genres like black or death metal). While they helped to make metal popular again (which was seen as negative by some), Pantera’s lyrical style also lends to easy interpretation as the message of the song is often clear and the band’s philosophy of life can be easily noticed through a quick survey of its lyrics. It is for this reason that I chose the title, *Hellbound*, for this dissertation – a reference to the band’s song by the same name, in which they shout “Hellbound in Fort Worth, Texas”, a mention of their own hometown.

Power and Reality

Power, then, within the context of heavy metal, is seen as a power *against* something. This something, often called the *status quo*, or popular culture, is much more than a simple socio-political system but much more the actual constructed reality that is Modernity. In other words, the socio-political systems and epistemologies that fuel society as a whole and influence both the abilities and limitations of individuals are what make up our modern world system. Heavily influenced by Western thought, this world system exists underneath of the workings of society and even within our own ideas about ourselves. Slavoj Žižek explains that, “Ideology is not simply a ‘false consciousness’, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’ –

*‘ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants to its essence.’*⁴⁸ In other words, what many metalheads describe as the ‘ignorance’ of those who follow the *status quo* is simply an acceptance of the ‘illusory representation of reality’ with which most experience the world.

This, then, implies that the world *can* be experienced in different ways, even if there exists a dominating set of ideologies, like Modernity. However, this is an idea that is very much to our own age and is thus a part of the definition of Modernity itself. In other words, we are only able to express our understanding of the limitations of reality and their influences on socio-cultural norms *because* the very same epistemologies that have built them have provided us the language with which to do so. While escape is not 100% possible, or even probable, what can be done is a restructuring of thought, or at least, a recognition of those limitations placed upon us by Modernity. To understand this better, we must first understand *how* Modernity works. Heidegger explains in his essay “The Age of the World Picture” that Modernity is posited in five different phenomena: 1) Science, 2) Modern Technology, 3) Art as subjective aesthetics, 4) Culture, and 5) the loss of the gods⁴⁹. While Science, Modern Technology, Art and Culture are more-or-less easy to explain as deciding differences between the modern and the ancient, the idea of the “loss of the gods” is much more confusing, for most (although especially relished by those metalheads who desire a break away from modern Christianity).

Heidegger explains that,

The loss of the gods is a twofold process. On the one hand, the world picture is Christianized inasmuch as the cause of the world is posited as infinite, unconditional, absolute. On the other hand, Christendom transforms Christian doctrine into a world view (the Christian world

⁴⁸ Žižek, 15 – 16. (emphasis original)

⁴⁹ Heidegger, 116 – 117.

view), and in that way makes itself modern and up to date. The loss of the gods is the situation of indecision regarding God and the gods. Christendom has the greatest share in bringing it about.⁵⁰

Thus the spread of Christianity and its doctrines across the globe through war and imperialism – an issue central to heavy metal production (especially folk metal and, by extension, tribal metal) – can be seen as one of the greatest factors in the eventual doubting of the tenets and even the existence of God (and the gods). This is not to say that this doubting is the result of wars and imperialism, although these specific ideologies and their socio-political and cultural ramifications are part of the same, but that the spread of Christianity in epistemological form by force to other cultures and geo-political regions can be seen as a contributing factor in the undoing of its own faith. For it is in literature and the diffusion of ideas that Christianity was first spread and, ultimately, dismantled. Heidegger goes on to explain that,

the real locus of truth has been transformed by Christendom to faith – to the infallibility of the written word and to the doctrine of the Church. The highest knowledge and teaching is theology as the interpretation of the divine word of revelation, which is set down in Scripture and proclaimed by the Church. Here, to know is not to search out: rather it is to understand rightly the authoritative Word and the authorities proclaiming it.⁵¹

The written word, and its promulgation, then, was the powerhouse of the Church. It was through the written word that Christian doctrine was spread and through the written word that the power of the Church was solidified. This can be seen easily in two phenomena specific to Latin America in its conquest by the Spanish. First, the written word was used as justification to the crown and the Church for the claiming of the Americas as property of the Spanish Crown. The reading of the *requerimiento*, or

⁵⁰ Heidegger, 116 – 117.

⁵¹ Heidegger, 122.

‘requirement’, upon landfall to the indigenous (who could obviously not understand it) was a legal process that, through the vocal presentation and written record, solidified the Spaniard’s possession and legal right to the land and its people.

Second, the written Word (the Bible) was used throughout the conquest of the Americas to justify the mass slaughter and enslavement of the indigenous populations. The most famous example, of course, being the encounter between Francisco Pizarro and Atahualpa in the Incan empire of Peru. As the story goes, in his meeting with Atahualpa, Pizarro was asked what right he had to take possession of the lands to which he responded that the Bible *told* him that he had the right (holding up the Bible to show it to Atahualpa who could not possibly understand the idea of a writing system since the Incans *had no writing system*). Confused, Atahualpa took up the Bible and held it to his ear saying that he heard nothing coming from it and threw it to the ground. In a fit of rage, Francisco Pizarro seized his opportunity to claim blasphemy as the reason for his conquest and imprisoned the Incan King. In both of these instances, the written word, both through the modern legal system and the literal “Word of God” were used as the foundation for the justification of the creation of our modern world system.

However, the influence of Christianity and the written word on a massive scale was even more subtle than these two very blatant examples. In fact, the Bible and the way in which it represents reality became integrated into socio-cultural understandings of the world and, by extension, the political and institutional epistemologies that shape our modern world. Erich Auerbach in his work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, defines the differences in representations of reality in Biblical texts and those of Classical literature and how the

conglomeration over time of the two helped to form our modern world picture. He explains that,

The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's it is tyrannical – it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality – it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place *within its frame, will be subordinated to it*. The scripture stories do not, like Homer's court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us – they seek to subject us and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.⁵²

It is then in this “claim to truth” and its implementation into the modern world picture that Christianity and Western epistemologies solidify their power over thought, society, politics and even culture. It is the idea of the subordination of all other thought (indigenous, communist, socialist, etc.) and all other religions to the socio-political power of Christianity and Western thought that is hidden underneath of our ideas and ideologies and, yet, many times we are unable to grasp that they are there. It is exactly *this* phenomenon that heavy metal attempts to grasp. The idea is that personal empowerment, through the deconstruction of modern, Western, Christian frames of thought, can eventually lead to a freeing of oneself from this thought and, in turn, a freeing of society from the death-grasp of them. It is within this space that heavy metal attacks the modern on stage, in daily life and even in consciousness.

Gender and Power

One of the most obvious problematics about discourses of power that are fueled by the modern world picture is that, within this system, power is often seen as having a relation to gender. That is to say that power is most often related to an

⁵² Auerbach, 15. (emphasis mine)

overall sense of masculinity. For many years, heavy metal, for this reason, has been seen as a 'boys' club' in which masculine tendencies rule and there is virtually 'no place' for women. This is very apparent from early scholarship about heavy metal. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett in his work, "Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation", explains by saying,

Heavy metal is largely a male domain. The performance as well as the fans are predominantly male, and... there are elements of the subculture that are distinctively related to maleness and manhood. In particular, the concert scene exalts traditionally male virtues of toughness and aggressiveness (through the music as well as through slamdancing). More generally, the high-sensation intensity of the music appeals more to males, with their generally higher appetites for sensation. However, there are also adolescent girls whose sensation-seeking tendencies are high enough for heavy metal music to appeal to them.⁵³

For Arnett, and many early scholars, the aggressiveness of metal and its play with power-politics is directly related to a sense of masculinity. This should not be a surprise as, in a general sense, the ideas of violence and aggressiveness have always been linked to masculinity (i.e., sports, wrestling, boxing, etc.). However, the problem here is when this idea of a relationship with masculinity becomes exclusive of other genders. To say that heavy metal is a masculine endeavor is one thing, but to imply that the feminine is excluded from it is another. The leap between the two is not far. Deena Weinstein makes such a leap in "Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology" when she writes,

The barriers confronting women in heavy metal are more fundamental than those encountered by blacks. The predominance of whites in the genre is mostly a historical accident, whereas the bias against women is rooted in the delineated meaning of heavy metal music. No racist themes match the macho ideology of the genre. The antifemale posturing of heavy metal stars relates less to misogyny than to a rejection of the cultural values associated with femininity. In Western culture, as feminist scholars have noted, masculinity and femininity are dichotomous and mutually opposed cultural forms into which men and

⁵³ Arnett, 139.

women are forced to fit. Men are supposed to be powerful, tough, and strong, whereas women are supposed to be delicate and weak.... Masculinity means being active and femininity means being passive. Men act, women are acted upon - through sight, touch, or merely imaginative transformations. Power, the essential inherent and delineated meaning of heavy metal, is culturally coded as a masculine trait.⁵⁴

On the surface, it would seem that Weinstein and Arnett's arguments are valid. A music that is centered around power *could* inherently hold masculine codes that *could* exclude the feminine. However, much like we have seen with the issue of race, heavy metal is *not* an exclusive artform. Instead, the flexibility of metal is exactly in its inclusiveness. It is an elastic art form that expands and contracts around those that use it. This elasticity easily allows a space for women (and even members of the LGBTQ community⁵⁵) to become welcome and respected producers within the genre.

The most interesting oversight, in my opinion, by scholars like Weinstein and Arnett, as it regards gender in metal, is the fact that, at the time they were writing their investigations into the scene, the majority of metal music was centered around hair metal or what we now call glam rock. The common characteristic of these bands was their overt androgyny. The bands were comprised of long-haired men who wore tight, bright spandex, full beauty make-up and enough hair supplies to make Vidal Sassoon jealous. While the bands were definitely oversexed and the role of women in the scene (at that time) was closer to sexual object than artistic producer, many early scholars failed to notice the play of gender that was happening on the stage in front of them. They also failed to notice the argument (that still remains with the use of pornographic imagery in metal) that female sexuality should be liberated from its

⁵⁴ Weinstein, 67.

⁵⁵ Virginia State Delegate Danica Roem is a transgender heavy metal singer for the melodic death metal band, Cab Ride Home. Her acceptance both in the metal world (along with other famous members of the LGBTQ community like Rob Halford of Judas Priest) and in Virginia as a Delegate should suffice to make my point.

common Western value system. In other words, the expression of female sexuality in music videos and on stage was often meant as a means of liberating female sexuality, even if it ultimately assisted in further promoting the image of woman as sexual object. Heather Savigny and Sam Sleight explain that,

Dominant discourses may make assumptions about the masculine nature of heavy metal, yet at the same time... the androgyny and femininity associated with metal, in acts such as Bon Jovi, Poison, David Lee Roth are able to challenge dominant masculinities in a way that did not and does not take place in many more 'mainstream' pop acts. And as heavy metal is dominated by men, in both its articulation and its fan base (although the latter is changing), it is actually no different from any other types of music production in its situation in a patriarchal discourse. Perhaps what is different about heavy metal as a genre however, rather than pop for example, is its marginality from the mainstream and its capacity to be 'political'. This marginality thus provides a site where political struggle can be enacted and where challenges to and subversion of gender norms becomes possible. In this context acts may be able to 'perform' gender in ways different than would be possible with the mainstream.⁵⁶

Therefore, metal in its marginality can be seen as an appropriate site for the exploration of themes of power that are necessary for the 'subversion of gender norms'. This is not to say that heavy metal in any way creates an equal space for women in their articulation of their gender or in the expression of their power over defined gender norms. It is to say, however, that heavy metal has the potential for such and that the nuances of feminine power are present in many places throughout the metal world – both on and off stage.

These nuances, however, were never truly lost on the metal community. The role of women in the community has always been shown importance both at live concerts and in the media surrounding these events. Metal Hammer's Eleanor Goodman recently explored the issue in her article "Does metal have a sexist

⁵⁶ Savigny and Sleight, 344 – 345.

problem?”. Through the interviewing of various female personas in the metal world, Goodman writes,

sexism *is* still a barrier to entry in heavy music, whether it’s because women are being actively discriminated against at some level or are simply put off trying because of having to ‘jump the extra hurdle’. But she also thinks representation is an issue. For example, the pop world has a higher proportion of women on stages.⁵⁷

My argument here is not that sexism in metal does not exist or that there are not still remnants of a ‘boys’ club’ type-of-feeling at concerts and venues or within the industry as a whole. Rather, I argue that, while this sexism *does* exist and the ‘machoness’ of heavy metal is hard to refuse because of its ties to engrained ideas of masculine power, the metal world itself is not only aware of the issue but actively tries to seek ways in which to correct it. The preoccupation of the ‘place of women’ in metal in articles like these from popular heavy metal magazines show that the producers within the community are attempting to propagate a culture in which women have an equal footing as men and in which female articulation is not only possible but a norm. While there is much work to be done in this area, as these articles have shown, the preoccupation itself is a ‘step in the right direction’, even though, admittedly, there is still much to be done in regards to gender equality in the scene.

One of the ways this is done is through the very same philosophy of empowerment being interpreted by female artists and fans. While power can be seen as masculine, it is not exclusive to masculinity. In fact, the idea of personal empowerment *has no gender* and is thus able to be expressed and utilized by all. This fact is what I believe makes metal such a fluid genre for people of all races, genders, nationalities, religions, etc.

⁵⁷ Goodman, *Metal Hammer*.

The ideas of specific traits that define either masculinity and femininity, we must remember, are built upon Western epistemologies and are, thus, integrated into the modern worldview. This is to say that those characteristics used to *define* masculinity and femininity are built upon the foundation of Western thought and metaphysics, so, in a sense, we are somewhat bound by them. It is only through philosophical exercises, like negation, or through the expressions of personal freedoms in society, like sex changes, that these ideas are truly questioned at their core. The reason that heavy metal is such a fluid genre is exactly because it is built upon questioning Modernity and everything that goes with it. It should be no surprise then that there *is* a space for the voice of those groups that some would believe could not fit into the genre because of their skin color or their pre-defined gender – mainly because they have not escaped Modernity and see heavy metal through the very frame which it attempts to shatter.

Personal power, then, and its ties to feelings of ‘powerlessness’ and, by extension rage, are all ideas that are translatable across the vast variety of human experience. So much so that Goodman ends here article with the conclusion that,

If there’s a common thread that emerges from all the women we spoke to, it’s determination. In 2018, there’s a heightened collective awareness of the power structures at work in society, theoretically making it easier to call out sexism in the music industry. Change takes time, but it is happening, and Julie and Maria point to the exciting new class of bands rising up, such as Code Orange and Venom Prison. It might still take some extra work to succeed, but it can be done.⁵⁸

Of course, when viewing the position of women in heavy metal, even when the stage lends itself to their empowerment or, at least, their questioning of the patriarchy, it is an understatement to say that ‘it might still take some extra work to succeed, but it

⁵⁸ Goodman, *Metal Hammer*.

can be done'. The truth is that *a lot* more could be done to improve the equality of women in the heavy metal scene. While it should go without saying that women should not be groped at concerts and that women can play in a metal band 'just like men', the fact that it must be articulated points to an area in heavy metal that still needs to be worked on by the community – and on a larger socio-cultural level. In El Salvador, it is not uncommon for many metalheads to invite their female friends to concerts and to expect sex in return for the invitation (partially because many view female metalheads as more sexually promiscuous and partially because many view the sexual act as a mere economic exchange, something that is inherent in the scene's affinity for strip clubs and things like pornography). While heavy metal provides a space for personal empowerment and even empowerment for women, today it is much more of a potential space than it is an actual space. The only hope that this space 'opens up' and becomes more of a reality than a manner of defending metal is that the scene recognize these contradictions and work to correct them.

The *idea* of determination, however, is directly linked to ideas of personal empowerment. To be determined is to empower oneself towards a goal. This philosophy permeates through heavy metal in all of its production and its articulations. It is no surprise then that the ideas of gender in metal have changed so much over time. Bands like Arch Enemy that are 'female-fronted' (although I hate the title like many other metalheads⁵⁹), have proven that women are not only part of the metal scene through their affinity for the music, but they are also a very important part of the artistic production and essential to the diversity of the music across the board.

⁵⁹ For more information on the distaste for terminology like 'female-fronted', see Kelsey Chapstick's *MetalSucks* article "Why it's important to stop using 'female-fronted' as a metal genre right now."

In places like El Salvador, where a culture of ‘machismo’ still pervades today, it would seem like it would be harder for women to participate in a genre like heavy metal. Although the system of patriarchy might be reinforced in El Salvador through the culture of *machismo*, it is important to note here that the same system is an invention of Western epistemologies in which the ideas of masculinity and femininity were debated over time and certain values were placed on each. In this system, driven by these epistemologies, the feminine is seen as subordinate to the masculine and, therefore, not prohibited to contribute to certain systems (mainly systems of power). A good example would be the discourses surrounding Hillary Clinton’s running for president where both sides oftentimes focused more on her role as a woman than on her actual qualifications for the office. Likewise, in metal, worldwide, the identity of musicians of the female gender has often been used against them; however, within this same context, the gender roles have been increasingly questioned. While the ground work may have been laid in basic discourse and arguments within the community, the fact is that women in metal must work much harder for men and women fans must, many times, fight for a basic level of respect that they should not have to fight for within a community that considers itself progressive in the questioning of modern value-systems. This is mainly due to metal’s own Philosophy of questioning these very same epistemologies in musical production and on stage, even if the enunciators often find themselves trapped within them.

Nonetheless, in a country where women are overtly marginalized by society as a whole under an archaic patriarchal system⁶⁰, one would think that it would be even more difficult to break into a community that is supposedly ruled by masculine codes.

⁶⁰ As I have explained, this is not to imply that systems of patriarchy are not present in the United States and Europe but that ‘machismo’ and patriarchal systems in El Salvador, as I have observed them, are much more overt and very difficult to ignore and/or deny.

However, as we have seen that this is not truly the case, it is easy to understand the very large presence of female artists in the heavy metal scene in El Salvador. Bands like Heresies, Aeon Veil, Aurora, Clar de Lune (amongst others), all have female singers and instrumentalists. The female presence is so vivid that local magazines like “Más” have even published articles illustrating the achievements of these local artists, like the article, “Estas cantantes se lucen en la escena metalera: Las chavas son las vocalistas de sus respectivas bandas. Todas poseen una amplia trayectoria en la música”⁶¹ [These female singers shine in the metal scene. The young women are the vocalists of their respective bands. They all have a long history in music.]. This is not to say, though, that the simple presence of female singers and artists is enough to demarcate any type of gender equality within the scene. However, it is enough to debunk the idea that masculine ideas of power within the music, or within a society, ultimately exclude female actors from becoming a part of the community and its artistic production.

For some of these vocalists, the path to becoming a metal vocalist was more difficult than for others. Kriscia Landos of the deathcore band Aeon Veil recognizes the culture of machismo in El Salvador when she says, “He conocido un par de culturas, y observé un rol muy parecido, en El Salvador han normalizado el machismo, el acoso entre otras situaciones” [I have become familiar with a few cultures and I have observed a very similar role, in El Salvador ‘machismo’ has been normalized, sexual harassment amongst other situations]. However, when she speaks about her role in the metal scene, she makes the following observations,

A principio cuando me di a conocer por primera vez en el 2007 sentí una gran diferencia pero siempre positiva por ser mujer. Todos estaban sorprendidos al escucharme cantar. Actualmente ya es como generalizado, hoy ya el público se enfoca más en nuestra música...Hasta

⁶¹ “Estas cantantes se lucen en la escena metalera...”, *Más*.

el momento por ser mujer no he sentido rechazo totalmente quizás en lo que he observado que un par de medios que se desenvuelven en el metal que han dado más apoyo a otros grupos que incluyen a una mujer y no a mí. No lo he visto equitativo, sus razones tendrán... [El] machismo no influye, más bien es elitismo, aquí en la escena está muy dividida en que si no soy del agrado o amiga de alguien no somos tomados en cuenta, y no solo me pasa eso por ser mujer, si no que otros grupos muy talentosos se han visto afectados por ello.

[At the beginning when I was becoming known for the first time in 2007, I felt a big difference but always positive for being a woman. Everybody was surprised to hear me sing. Nowadays it is more generalized, today the public now focuses on our music... Up unto this moment as a woman I have not felt rejected totally maybe in that I have observed a few media groups that have developed in metal that have given more help to other bands that have a woman and not helped me. I have not seen it as equitable, they must have their reasons... 'machismo' does not influence it, rather it is elitism, here in the scene that is very divided in that if I do not rub someone the right way or I am not a friend to someone, we are not included, and it doesn't just happen to me because I am a women, but many other very talented groups have felt the effect of it.]⁶²

While a general 'masculine' culture *can* be found both in El Salvador and in the heavy metal scene internationally, there is much to be said for a type of music that fights against its own barriers, as well as those barriers placed against it. For many women who feel oppressed by patriarchal power structures and the culture of machismo, heavy metal is the perfect place to voice their distaste with such a system or such a society. Heavy metal, through its articulation of power provides a means for the individual, at bare minimum on a philosophical level, the tools to both battle with feelings of powerlessness and to overcome both individual and socio-cultural limitations. As it regards gender, it is easy to see how such a discourse, with its many nuances, can both be helpful and detrimental to the articulation of gender specific discourses. Nonetheless, the fact that heavy metal provides a space for this

⁶² Interview with Kriscia Landos.

articulation and for the intellectual debating of ‘where to go from here’ speaks a lot to its versatility and to the reason *why* it is cherished so much by those who engage in it.

The idea of overcoming, then, I assert, comes from a general feeling of powerlessness against the world. The need to overcome implies a *something* – an obstacle or an oppressor – is not gender specific. It is also not simply a general idea of overcoming one’s own station in life (while this is included) but is more an expression against systems of power, people, ideas, values, etc. that ‘hold down’ a person or prohibits them either from expressing themselves freely or from ‘becoming their best self’. This could be, as I have mentioned, either on a personal level (familial relationships/personal limitations) or on a societal level (overbearing Christian values/stigmatization or marginalization). In El Salvador, where gang violence increases every year and the average citizen is powerless against oligarchical power structures and brutal military and police forces, this sense of powerlessness is abundant and is one of the reasons why El Salvador is such a ‘hot spot’ for extreme types of music like heavy metal. It is important, however, to understand that Salvadorans have different ways of dealing with these issues and that not all are tied to metal, and some that are not directly tied to metal overlap into metal through the fact that Salvadoran metalheads, while considering themselves a separate part of society, are still Salvadorans and are therefore influenced by their own society as a whole (no matter how much some would not like to admit it).

El *valeverguismo* as an expression of power

As a small Central American country on the periphery of larger “powerhouse” nations, like the United States, El Salvador is no stranger to marginalization on both political and social fronts. Oftentimes, the country is summarized in travel guides and academic works with an excess of information regarding its agricultural economics,

its recent civil war, its identity as a “tropical” or “third-world” country, its “underdevelopment” or its recent mass urbanization focused around the capital, San Salvador. While all of these focuses are equally valid, what is missing from a lot of the writing about El Salvador is a focus on its culture and, especially, the understanding that the culture is multi-dimensional. While the popular music may be *cumbias*, that does not infer that *cumbia* is the sole cultural production and/or expression of the country’s people.

In fact, El Salvador has a long history of interactions with both the United States and European cultures that has helped build a rich and diverse cultural identity. This can be seen in the existence of the heavy metal sub-culture that has had a lasting presence since the early 1980s, that has even survived a civil war and is still going strong, despite strong socio-cultural stigmatization. For such a sub-culture (or better yet, simply, culture) to exist, the idea of power is central to its success. Fighting against both internal (national) and external (international) stigmatization and marginalization, the Salvadoran metal scene has been defiant, not only in surviving, but in making large advances and transcending the borders that once kept them imprisoned.

Part of this defiant attitude can be summed up in the local phenomena known as, *valeverguismo*. This phenomena is centered around a local, popular idiomatic expression: “vale verga”. Its literal translation is “It’s worth a dick”. With the reflective “me” added (“me vale verga”), the phrase engenders a personal attitude of aloofness and overcoming of quotidian circumstances and socio-political oppression – i.e., “It’s worth a dick *to me*”. In the local imagining, then, a person who is a “valeverguista” is someone who does not care about things or is not essentially

affected by the “everyday”. Alex “Negro Centenario” Palacios, defines the idea of “vale verga” and the “valeverguista” as follows:

Vale Verga: hace referencia a que ‘No importa’, ‘Me da igual’, ‘Indiferencia a algo o a las cosas.’

Valeverguista: Persona a la cual todo le da lo mismo o poco le importa las consecuencias de sus actos o actos de los demás.

[*Vale Verga*: a reference to the fact that ‘It doesn’t matter’, ‘I don’t care’, ‘Indifference to something or to things.’

Valeverguista: A person to whom nothing matters or who puts little importance on the consequences of their actions or the actions of others”].⁶³

I personally asked Alex, more commonly known as ‘Negro’, for his definition of “Vale Verga” because his on stage persona embodies this very attitude. Despite his humble living conditions and his marginalization in the community due to such, Negro’s domineering stage presence demands attention. The fast-paced and defiant music of the thrash metal band that he formally fronted (Social S.S.) lyrically “spits in the face” of societal norms and taboos. With popular songs like “Live Fast, Die Young” and “Policías Muerto” [Dead Police], the band is a cornerstone of the metal community and is present at shows year-round. Given the attitude of this genre and the band itself, it is no surprise then that Alex is known for heavy drinking, partying and simply not caring about what others within the community and within his society think of him. In fact, his *valeverguista* attitude is so infamous that his twitter account under the name “LordVulgarSV” has been blocked many times for reports of inappropriate and vulgar content (an affirmation of the other phenomena of vulgarity,

⁶³ Definitions written by Alex Palacios.

pornographic imagery and an overall sense of dark humor that I explore in chapter four of this work).

Songs like the band's, "Policías Muertos" – which is a simple thrash metal song lasting all of one minute with the simple lyrics 'Policías Muertos. Mueren' [Dead police. Die.] – are an articulation of their rage against the very same community that tries to pressure people like Alex into conformity with their social norms. The song written in the early 90s also speaks to the "prophetic" capabilities of musical production as explored by Jacques Attali in that the rage against the police state in El Salvador that *was* and *is* articulated by metal bands like Social S.S. in a fantastical, violent revenge against their oppressors has actually turned into a *real* part of society by the other rage group, the Mara Salvatrucha, in their war against the police and the military. In other words, what was once the fantasy of one group, has become the reality of the more militant rage group that has no other recourse to vent their rage than to violently attack those that they see as oppressors. The reality of 'dead police' in El Salvador, though, has not changed the stance of bands like Social S.S. for the obvious reasons that the police force continues to oppress the Salvadoran citizenry with the excuse that it is actually working against the street gangs. Regardless of this endless polemic, the point is that, even with the rise of actual dead police, bands like Social S.S. continue to speak of socio-political change in their aggressive music and confrontational lyrics, – a cornerstone of heavy metal music – however this articulation is, many times, more of an expression of their rage than it is an affectual system of creating socio-political change (a limitation on contemporary rage groups that Sloterdijk points to in his work). It is the mixture of this with the local culture of *valeverguismo* that makes the Salvadoran metal scene itself such a unique articulation of these discourses.

However, it would be a gross misrepresentation on my part to claim *valeverguismo* solely for El Salvador or for the heavy metal community. In fact, the phenomena is part of a larger Central American community that both recognizes and utilizes the phrasing in the same manner (although most recognize the fact that it originates in El Salvador) and is also utilized in other genres of music in the country. The ska band, Adhesivo, for example, has a popular song entitled “Vale Verga”. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

Vale verga. vale verga, vale verga, Nadie se preocupa por tus mierdas.	It doesn't matter, It doesn't matter, It doesn't matter. Nobody is worried about your shit.
Todos te detestan, A nadie le interesas, Todos quieren que te vayas a la mierda.	Everyone hates you, You aren't important to anyone, Everyone wants you to fuck off.
Vale verga, Me vale verga, vale verga, vale verga, Nadie se preocupa por tus mierdas.	It doesn't matter, It doesn't matter to me, It doesn't matter, It doesn't matter. Nobody cares about your shit.
Todos te ignoran, Todos te maltratan, Todos quieren que te vayas a la chingada.	Everyone ignores you, Everyone mistreats you, Everyone wants you to fuck off. ⁶⁴

The fact is that the phenomenon of *valeverguismo* is part of a long tradition of disillusionment, or *desengaño*, in both El Salvador and Central America as a whole. Many of the countries of Central America have faced similar problems as those faced by El Salvador. Among them include American military intervention in sovereign affairs, corrupt local politicians, extreme poverty, frequent military coups and dictatorships, extreme gang violence, overthrown governments, drug trafficking, mass emigration, etc., etc. For many, the ideals of youth, where one believes that they can be anything or reach any stratus of society, are quickly dashed against the stones of local social reality.

⁶⁴ Vale Verga lyrics, *Musixmatch*.

As I have mentioned, this disillusionment leads to either a complacency, where one accepts their place in society, or a rebellion (driven by rage), where one rejects both their place in society and society as a whole. For those who cannot be complacent, there are many forms of protest. In fact, Latin America has a long history of social protest and unrest due to the many issues mentioned. Where social protest has failed, but complacency has still not occurred, attitudes like that of *valeverguismo* provide both a sense of rebellion against the system and a sense of (psychological) distancing from those issues that make one feel powerless. Therefore, *valeverguismo* in and of itself is an expression of power in the hopes of overcoming this overall sense of powerlessness.

The Stage and Spectacle as a Source of Social Protest

For this power to function and to have lasting results in the reality of daily life, it is essential that it is spread through an effective means. The initial means of spreading the ideas of power and questioning Modernity was through the use of musical recordings and the sharing of music, what Jacques Attali calls “Repetition”. In places in El Salvador where the modern factor of technology often arrives later than in ‘developed’ areas of the world, it has become important that repetition finds a new place of enunciation. While CDs and tapes have been readily available, it was not until the invent of YouTube, Facebook and the arrival of High-Speed Internet to the region that the idea of repetition through recordings was able to properly take hold. Before then, the place of enunciation for this repetition was the stage. The theatricality of the stage show not only provided a space, as we will see, where Western and modern ideologies could be questioned but also provided the space for repetition to occur. The fact that bands like Broncco have only had one full-length recording over their 47 years as a band but the majority of metalheads and rock fans

in the country know the words to almost every song should be enough to demonstrate the accuracy of this claim.

Samuel Weber explains that,

what therefore ‘happens’ on the stage is not the communication of something new, in the sense of content, but the variation of something familiar through its repetition. Repetition thus emerges as a visible, audible, and constitutive element of the theatrical medium. To vary Heidegger’s observation, it is not so much *what* is said or shown but the *way* that showing takes place⁶⁵

As I have previously explored, as a rage group, metalheads openly display their distaste for modern society and its implications in El Salvador. While groups like the *MS13s* and *18s* express this rage through violence against the system and its citizens, metalheads look for a *katharsis* for the same rage in the theatricality of the stage show. In this sense, the function of *katharsis*, according to Weber, is “to confirm the transformation of *opsis* into *synopsis*, of medium into means, and of the events represented on stage into complete and meaningful sequences of a unified action and life.”⁶⁶ Therefore, the stage show is not simply a platform for the performance of music but a place for the congregation of a community around a shared set of ideas and philosophies that both inform and influence their daily lives. To separate the two is almost impossible. So, while the concert provides *katharsis* from the rage felt against society, it also provides a space for this *katharsis* to assist in adapting this rage into a system of living.

⁶⁵ Weber, 24.

⁶⁶ Weber, 104.

This is only possible because of our very own modern understanding of the stage spectacle and the space that it creates for both the performer and the audience.

William Egginton explains that,

what is in fact at stake is a form of spatiality, *presence*, that allows for the direct interconnection of bodies with words, gestures, and meaning – allows for, in other words, the *substantial* transmission of meaning across what for modern sensibilities would be empty space.⁶⁷

In other words, the stage show can be interacted with by the audience on multiple different levels that are only possible because of our modern understanding of the spectacle and our own *presence* at an event. For example, when a Black Mass is performed on stage by a black metal band, like Watain, it is very real for the artist in their performance. The acting out of the Mass is believed to have ‘real world’ implications and to affect reality. For the audience, however, the functioning of *presence* can allow the audience to participate in the Black Mass and to feel that the very same implications are true for them and that they are real participants in a real ritual (as is true for indigenous rituals on stage). Conversely, the audience, through their understanding of *presence*, can also detach themselves from the spectacle and see it simply as a show in which their participation is not necessary and, as simple observers, will have no lasting effects on their reality. In other words, modern theatricality creates a space where one can enjoy the show as show or can participate in the show as spectacle. Egginton further explains,

this telescoping of separable spaces requires audiences to negotiate different levels of reality, which they do by means of characters or avatars, virtual selves that become conditioned to this new, fundamentally scopic organization of space, in which they watch and are watched watching, they become bodies saturated by the gaze.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Egginton, 4.

⁶⁸ Egginton, 121. (emphasis original)

Impossible for the medieval crowd because of their understanding of spatiality and presence, the modern understanding of theatricality is *exactly* what makes the stage show an affective place for the performance of repetition. Not only are the same songs, gestures and ideas repeated from one stage show to the next at a metal show, but the audience's understanding of themselves as possible receptors of the avatars that are upon the stage (the band members) allows them to leave the show believing that the show has had a lasting impact on their reality and will continue to inform their behavior beyond the actual concert itself. This repetition through behavior, accepted community norms, attitudes and even consciousness is exactly what I am attempting to draw out in this dissertation. Beyond a simple act of catharsis or simply a 'fun time', the heavy metal concert is a place where ideologies are shared and learned and where the Philosophy of Life is both displayed and propagated amongst the members of the community. In fact, without the stage show, the simple repetition of the musical form would *not* have the same impact and heavy metal would cease to become a space where ideas of socio-political and individual power can be diffused and engrained in the community, further influencing its Philosophy of Life.

This phenomenon is especially apparent at black metal and tribal metal shows as both of these genres attempt to question the *status quo* through the similar return to historical ideologies that either pre-dated or helped to constitute Modernity and its influence on contemporary reality. Nonetheless, it is throughout the metal world, regardless of genre, that the ideas of power against the world and against Modernity is ever present. These ideas of power grow, as I have explained, out of a sense of powerlessness against socio-political circumstances and even the encroachment of Modernity on society. For many, this powerlessness is something tangible in their

everyday lives and the heavy metal spectacle has become essential in their quotidian survival – hence the effectiveness of micro-discourses, like *valeverguismo*, that ‘arm’ the metalhead with philosophical and emotional weapons against situations that many would have trouble overcoming.

For example, in 2016, when I was in El Salvador, Alejandro “Chele” Paredes, guitar player for popular deathcore act, Virginia Clemm, was attacked by the PNC (Policía Nacional Civil) in front of his house. The reason that he was attacked (physically) was because of his tattoos. Alejandro, as many metalheads, has most of his body covered in tattoos. However, since the local gangs identify themselves through tattoos, there is often some ‘overlap’ in police and military oversight of civilians. In Alejandro’s case, he was simply stopped for questioning because of his tattoos, in front of his house. Since, like most metalheads, he was not willing to quietly submit himself to local ‘authority’, the police began to beat him physically (in front of his mother). After the intervention of local business owners and neighbors who know Alejandro well, the police gave up and left. When I asked him about the incident, he simply said that he felt *impotente* [powerless] and, as a final quip, “vale verga”.

This story expresses what many Salvadorans and, especially, metalheads experience in El Salvador. I, personally, have even been stopped by the military and lined up against a wall simply because of my tattoos. Luckily, because of my United States citizenry and passport, they let me go *sans* beating. However, for many, the reality of beatings by local police and military with the excuse that they ‘look like gang members’ is a common occurrence. The problem for them is that they cannot run to the United States embassy and report the officers. Instead, they *could* report the officers at a local precinct, but this would only alert the officers and probably provoke

an unwanted, personal visit from those very same officers at the citizen's home. Alejandro's response of *vale verga* (like that of many citizens) expresses a resentment and a simultaneous conformity/acceptance of the situation but also a psychological distancing from it in order to continue with a positive attitude against seemingly insurmountable odds.

The *Mara Salvatrucha* connection and socio-political power

While the stage is the place of enunciation for the catharsis of rage for the Salvadoran metalhead, the *Mara Salvatrucha* expresses a similar rage on a much bigger stage – the stage of the world. In other words, while metalheads use consciousness to overcome their socio-political entanglements, the *Mara Salvatrucha* uses extreme violence in the real streets of the world (no smoke and mirrors here). The supposed relation, then, between metalheads and gang members speaks to a broader socio-political reality that has been informed by both sensationalist journalism and misinformed scholarship. The most damaging scholarly work, at least for metalheads, is easily Thomas W. Ward's, *Gangsters Without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang*. In it, Ward creates a direct correlation between the origin of the street gang and groups of Salvadoran metalheads in Los Angeles. He writes,

According to the elders of the gang *that I interviewed* – the *veteranos* or old timers who were around from the start – the real roots of MS [Mara Salvatrucha] date back to the mid- to late 1970s, when a group of longhaired devil worshipers got together and formed a stoner gang, which they call Mara Salvatrucha Stoners, or MSS... As a stoner gang, MSS was as different from street gangs as heavy metal music is from gangster rap, the types of music that inform each of these groups respectively.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ward, 76. (emphasis mine)

Ward makes the classical inference that ‘longhaired devil worshipers’ and fans of ‘heavy metal music’ are synonyms for the same thing. While there are types of heavy metal that dabble in Satanism and the occult (as I will explore in chapter 2), the majority of metalheads use Satanism as a cathartic, tongue-in-cheek play against mainstream Christianity that rules their societies. Those metalheads that *do* consider themselves ‘real’ Satanists are normally followers of Anton Szandor LaVey’s brand of Satanism instead of a die-hard, ‘animal-sacrificing’ type of Satanism that has been popularized by fantasy horror films and highly misinformed yellow journalism around the subject. Unfortunately, Thomas Ward’s ‘ethnography’ falls into the trap that many fall into when it comes to understanding Satanism and its different expressions. He continues,

A few of [the Mara Salvatrucha Stoners] members were hard-core Satanists who worshipped the devil and went so far as to practice gruesome animal sacrifices. These Satanists gave MSS its badass reputation for evil. Although the vast majority of these stoners never participated in these bloody ritual animal sacrifices or gave any thought to becoming Satanists, they banked on their gang’s reputation for devil worship, which gave it and them an aura of mystery and terror. Stoners have *reportedly* killed lambs, pigs, goats, dogs, and cats by cutting out their livers or hearts or severing their heads. They have also been reported to squeeze hamsters to death with their bare hands, or shake them in a box of nails, and then smear the animal’s blood over their own bodies... There are also *unsubstantiated rumors* of stoners sacrificing humans, as in 1990, when four people were ritualistically slaughtered in Salida, California, as part of an initiation rite... over the course of research, I met with four of these hard-core Satanists, two of whom had joined the gang in Los Angeles and two in El Salvador.”⁷⁰

Ward’s own language in describing his ‘research’ betray the very same pitfalls into which he has fallen. He repeatedly makes bold claims as to violent acts perpetrated by supposed ‘Satanists’ and ‘members’ that he fails to identify and uses the word ‘reportedly’ as if it is actual verification that these stories and/or rumors are verifiably

⁷⁰ Ward, 77-79. (emphasis mine)

true. He never really connects any of these supposed ‘reports’ to any *actual*, fact-based reports in newspapers or police reports. In fact, he provides *no* proof of any validity to these claims and even ends up calling them ‘unsubstantiated rumors’ when trying to connect the gang to human ritual sacrifices that were never actually related to them by authorities.

He then continues to base his argument on interviews with people that he calls *veteranos* or ‘elders’ while admittedly only interviewing four people. While the stories of these four individuals *could* be true, I, and many others, find it hard to believe that an argument, much less an entire ethnography or history of a street gang can be written on the word of four individuals or even the other members of the cliques that Ward interviewed for the rest of the book. Ward’s biggest oversight is that the Mara Salvatrucha street gang is a *huge* gang that has infected many parts of the world and has *no* central organization. Unlike a revolutionary group like the FMLN or any former communist party, the street gang lacks a central governing organization that informs and directs the different branches of the gang. At the end of the day, the majority of the gang is comprised of small, local cliques that fight over territory with other local gangs and even within their own factions. While, over the past few years, the gang has tried to organize itself in its war against the police and military in El Salvador, the truth is that it continues to be a gang that is experienced differently from neighborhood-to-neighborhood, city-to-city and country-to-country. To write an ethnography based upon the stories of one local clique or even a few is to miss the entire point of how the gang *actually* works.

In fact, the rest of Ward’s ‘ethnography’ takes an apologetic tone and lightens the amount of mass chaos and terrorism that is actually perpetrated by the gang (as a whole). In other words, while some small cliques may not be involved in serious,

heinous crimes on a daily basis, the gang itself, as a unit, or as an ideological group, believes in the use of violence and terror in order to control territory and as a part of their everyday lives. A quick sweep of Salvadoran newspapers, or even reports of the gangs activities in the United States or anywhere else in the world, quickly displays the generalized brutality of a gang that is involved in dismembering bodies and other forms of extremely violent murders that rival (and sometimes top) those of the Mexican and Colombian drug cartels. Ward on the other hand writes a list of ‘the top twenty things MS gang members do, from “most frequent to least” in which “hanging out”, “sleeping at home” and “eating a meal” are in the top three and “committing one of a wide variety of crimes” (in which crimes like graffiti and ‘pimping prostitutes’ are made to seem equal in scope and intensity) is placed number 13 and “committing a gang-related homicide”⁷¹ is placed last at number 20. He even goes on with further apologetics by following up this last one with the following sentence: “It should be noted that the activity in which these MS gang members spend the least amount of time – drive-by shootings – is the one that gets the most attention and is reified in the minds of the public as the characteristic activity of all gang members.”⁷² It should go without saying, but apparently the nuance is missed by Ward, that drive-by shootings in which people, often innocents, are killed is definitely going to ‘get more attention’ from the public than ‘eating’, ‘sleeping’, or ‘hanging out’. It should also go without saying that these last three daily activities of pretty much *everybody on the planet* are more common than heinous and murderous crimes perpetrated by individuals who have joined a semi-militant group that both proports and promotes such activity. To compare such activities is almost as misplaced as trying to create an actual connection

⁷¹ Ward, 105 - 106.

⁷² Ward, 106 - 107.

between metalheads who intellectually investigate violence (something that I revisit in chapter four) and a group of individuals who use violence as a means of terrorizing their neighborhoods, cities, states and even their entire country.

At the bottom of this supposed connection is the common misunderstanding that two groups that are diametrically and philosophically opposed are somehow connected through their affinity for a common iconography. While both groups utilize Satan, Death and Devil Horns in their iconography (along with a love for tattoos), the manner in which these are used are very different. For example, Satanism for the Mara Salvatrucha is tied into a discourse of terror and instilling of fear within the community while Satanism for the metalhead is an exploration of ideologies that oppose Christianity and modern society (on a philosophical level).

For Satanism, like metal, the space of articulation of their distaste for society and their attempt to change the material and epistemological modern world is the stage. It is this place of articulation that separates groups like Satanists and metalheads from groups like the *mara salvatrucha* or ISIS. But this does not mean that Satanists and metalhead are synonyms. In fact, to infer that a metalhead with LaVey's brand of Satanism is capable of or participates in any type of real-world ritual beyond the stage, like actual animal sacrifice, is to completely miss the point (as this myth is one of the first one's attacked by LaVey in his *Satanic Bible*, something that Ward failed to even peruse as part of his study). In fact, amongst LaVey's "Nine Satanic Statements" are "Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it, instead of love wasted on ingrates!" and "Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his 'divine spiritual and intellectual development,' has become the most vicious

animal of all!”⁷³ In fact, animals are not mentioned *at all* in any of the Satanic Rituals or Black Masses, as described by LaVey – much less the preposterous idea of human sacrifices. Even in the extreme cases where murder has been tied in with Satanism, as it was with Norwegian black metal, these acts were deemed ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’ by the metal community at large and were more influenced by small groups of friends with internal political problems than it ever had to do with actual Satanism. The point here is that to tie these two types of Satanism together is almost as asinine as the other idea that an affinity for tattoos means that gang members and metalheads belong to the same or even a similar type of group. The idea, once investigated, is easily written off as preposterous. The problem is that most journalists and even some academics, as we have seen, have failed to look far enough into the issue to notice that there is no real connection here and, worse, have failed to realize that the creation of such a false connection actually puts the lives of many people in danger – especially in El Salvador.

The only real connection between the groups, then, is the one made by Sloterdijk in “Rage and Time”, as I mentioned in the introduction. What we have is two groups of (mainly) young men who are enraged with society but have no *real* hope of any revolutionary action to change the course of society. Sloterdijk explains, “Today’s rage carriers do not have a convincing narrative that could provide orientation or assign them a vital place in world affairs. In this situation, the return to ethnic or subcultural narratives is not surprising. If the latter are not available, they are replaced by local we-they constructions.”⁷⁴ In El Salvador, these ‘local we-they constructions’ actually place the metalhead and the gang member on opposite sides of

⁷³ LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 25.

⁷⁴ Sloterdijk, 205.

the fence. Generally speaking, gang members belong to the lower levels of society (economically speaking) and are normally young men that have little or no access to opportunities for social and/or class ascension. Part of their rage and hatred for the society around them is their own marginalization from such, both economically and socially.

The metalhead, on the other hand, generally belongs to the middle class of Salvadoran society. They have access to education and regular employment. Many own their own businesses or even work within the local government. They have access to instruments, practice spaces, recording studios, local media, international music groups (and even producers and promoters) and, probably most importantly, access to ascending their socio-economic conditions (often through international travel and access to the stage). The fact that the metalhead explores violence through music and the production of fantastical lyrics instead of through *actual* violence perpetrated against others within their own society shows how different the two groups are and how they have chosen to deal with the very same rage that they both feel. Ultimately, both groups are excluded from any inclusion into the upper or ruling classes. One group responds with sporadic and unorganized violence against its fellow citizens and authority figures, while the other explores these themes through musical production and usually only experiences violence in the friendly atmosphere of a mosh pit.

This rage leads to another common trait that Sloterdijk calls a ‘misanthropic mood’. He writes,

The more obscure aspects of the misanthropic mood are systematically ignored. In reality, the sociophobic-misanthropic tendency is endemic to the left as well as the right. In all opportune idioms it rages against the imposition of coexisting with whomever and whatever... with it a primary, unblended, and unmitigated misanthropy, the abysmal aversion to the social world and society, and even to the existence of the world in

general, becomes identifiable as radical behavior. Hereby it becomes apparent how misanthropy itself is the special form of an amorphous negativity that could be determined with concepts such as misocosmics or misontics: animosities against the world and what exists in the world as a whole.⁷⁵

There may be no better explanation than this for the generally recognized misanthropic, anti-social attitude of the metalhead. In fact, most metalheads wear their misanthropy and distaste for society and its values and norms as a badge of honor. This misanthropy is engrained in their attitude towards other types of music, popular culture, politics, Christianity and even in their retreat into fantastical past worlds (like the Vikings) and future post-apocalyptic landscapes. While the metalhead may fantasize about being free of society and enjoys expressing their affinity for taboos and non-conformity, this attitude is informed by the very same misanthropy that rises from the rage and hopelessness felt against a society and Western interpretations of reality that have solidified their power and eliminated the majority of possibilities for any type of mass social change.

The benefit for the metalhead is, overall, a sense of belonging to what Sloterdijk calls ‘a survival unit’. In fact, the title ‘metalhead’ (or what Deena Weinstein calls ‘proud pariahs’) shows the understanding of a common bond (what I call *fraternalismo* and explore in the conclusion to this thesis) that is born in an affinity for the music and grows through the shared philosophy of life and its resulting ‘lifestyle’. For the metalhead, like other rage groups, the belonging to a ‘unit’ is almost more important than any *real* changes in political or social climate. Sloterdijk explains,

By exerting imaginary stressful pressure on the attacked collective, it contributes to a feeling of belonging to a real community, a belonging based on solidarity, a survival unit wrestling for its own future in spite

⁷⁵ Sloterdijk, 212.

of recently severely deepened social differences. Additionally, the new terror creates, because of its undifferentiated hostility against Western forms of life, a climate of diffuse intimidation in which questions of political and existential security enjoy high priority over those of social justice – *quod erat operandum*.⁷⁶

While this explanation is meant to describe groups like ISIS, and could even be applied to the Mara Salvatrucha and similar gangs, the same is true for the metalhead. The difference being the plane on which this ‘terror’ and ‘questioning’ is placed. For the metalhead, it is a question of an ideological or philosophical plane in which the individual raises their consciousness against popular, conformist society and makes a change by rebelling both mentally and with their personal lifestyle, thus spreading this consciousness (in theory) from person-to-person and changing society as a whole (somewhat similar to Che Guevara’s idea of a ‘new man’ without the violent revolution, which is of course, as Sloterdijk points out, is no longer an available option). And, ultimately, the site of their enunciation is the stage spectacle, not the formal socio-political sphere of the universities and government nor the neighborhoods of the street gangs. Unfortunately though, part of belonging to this group of individuals means an increase in the ‘misanthropic mood’ from which it sprung, which is ever apparent in metal’s ‘in-your-face’ attitude against society.

This means, then, that the metalhead *does* actually believe that they can effectively change society, or at least contribute to its changing. The truth is, as I have just mentioned, that the metalhead hopes to change society by changing the individual, by raising their consciousness to a new level and ‘opening their eyes’ to ‘what is really going on’. So, although their misanthropy rises from an overall negativity, there is still an air of optimism in the attempt to raise social awareness and

⁷⁶ Sloterdijk, 218.

to make an actual impact on the society around them. In El Salvador, this happens in two different ways in the Salvadoran metal community which I explore in the following two chapters. The first is a return to the alt-right discourse of genocide mixed with Norwegian black metal's affinity for National Socialism and the iconic figure of Adolf Hitler. In this discourse, the only real answer to the woes of Salvadoran society is an extermination of the largest threat – the Salvadoran street gang. While born out of a desire to fix the social issues that plague the country, I hope to show how short-sighted and preposterous the idea of mass genocide really is (even though it probably goes without saying) and how a return to Hitler and his discourses is not only a ridiculous proposition but could actually assist in the very same discourse turning back upon the metal community when they are deemed 'undesirable' by their own society.

The second is equally a return but a return to the pre-Hispanic past. In this discourse, the manner in which one can battle the encroachment of Western thought and society upon El Salvador is to return to the Mayan ancestral past in which it did not exist. Through an exploration of Mayan themes, iconography and even the use of the language, many metalheads attempt to change the popular discourses of capitalism and, principally, the manner in which it ravages nature for a profit. Pre-Hispanic, or Pre-Colombian, "tribal metal" is yet another way of raising the consciousness of the individual and revealing 'the true nature' that lies within their blood – that of the Mayan who was closer to nature and, hence, whose spirituality is seen as superior to that of the Western/Capitalist interpretation of modern Christianity.

Ultimately, whether it be through the alt-right or leftist imaginations, metalheads filter their experiences and interactions with society through their philosophy of life. This philosophy is informed by the music and by the lifestyle that

comes along with it. The misanthropic attitude towards society bleeds through into everything that is produced and done within the scene. Most metalheads hold certain criteria for what makes one a ‘metalhead’ and what includes or excludes people from the group. While this changes between genres and international borders, the fact is that most metalheads understand each other because of the underlying philosophy of the world that I have delineated. This distaste is expressed in many different manners by the community as a whole.

The main way in which it is expressed is through the use of graphic imagery in the heavy metal world. Pornographic images and scenes of violence are common across almost all genres of metal. Added onto this is the affinity for violent, often blasphemous, language that is directed both at religion and at society. Because the metalhead exists antagonistically to the *status quo* of their society, the ability to shock others or, minimum, to set oneself apart drastically from others, is often relished by many. This philosophy is often a two-edged sword in the sense that the metalhead *feels* marginalized (and often laments it) but also enjoys their marginalization as a badge of courage in that they are markedly different from others – the proverbial wanting of the cake and wanting to eat it too. In my final chapter, I investigate the use of vulgarity, pornography, violence and an overall ‘dark humor’ that pervades the metal world and is ultimately translated across cultures and borders. These attitudes, backed by the philosophy of life, are the glue that often holds the community together and ends up creating the sense of brotherhood/sisterhood with which I conclude this dissertation.

While the metalhead often sees themselves as different from the rest of society, there is a general acceptance that they are still a part of that society and the desire to change things remains. The rage that builds up from an inability to affect

mass change is apparent in almost everything that the metalhead does. But the individual source of power that rises from heavy metal is fundamentally a part of the greater desire to change society. Whether this change is for better or worse is debatable and depends upon which side of the proverbial fence one sits. For the metalhead, the elimination of taboos and the ultimate expression of personal freedom in society is the final goal. This expression, built upon a foundation of personal consciousness, should help to build a better and more healthy society where the repression of certain instincts is eliminated and humans can co-exist in philosophical and personal freedom, unrestrained by archaic ideas that are engrained into the way that most see the world. For the metalhead, the battle is not against political systems *per se* or against governments and people, but against ideologies and philosophies that limit people, and by extension society, from reaching their full potential. The ways in which this can be achieved are many. I hope to uncover both the positive and negative aspects of just a few of them over the course of this work. But the key to understanding here is that music built around power is often born out a sense of powerlessness and this is what is most apparent within the Salvadoran metal scene as a whole.

Chapter 2

“Invocando las tinieblas”: Hitler and Contemporary Death Squads

“A believer in one kind of stigmatized knowledge tends to be receptive or open to other kinds of stigmatized knowledge – the fact that it is not accepted as true by the universities and mainstream media is interpreted to mean that [there] must be something to it.”

- Mattias Gardell⁷⁷

As a meta-discourse, there is probably no music genre more extreme than Norwegian black metal. The genre not only bases itself in the practice of the Occult and open Satanism, but also shares an affinity for a return to tribal (i.e., Viking) religions and for National Socialism, or Nazism. While many bands have tried to distance themselves from those that tout Nazi ideologies in their music and in their lifestyles, the link is found in the creation of the genre and is therefore, in a large sense, part of its discourse. The recent creation of the label NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal) is the ultimate attempt by other black metal fans to distance those bands that practice and purport these ideologies from those that want nothing to do with them.

Nonetheless, many of the founders of the movement had no qualms about their hatred for the Jewish population of Norway, the Christian Occupation of the same and, even, the British and Americans who had defeated Hitler in WWII. At the head of the movement, is the ever popular Varg Vikernes, or ‘Count Grishnackh’, who was sent to jail in 1994 for the violent murder of his fellow Mayhem bandmate, Euronymous, and for his involvement in local church burnings. Vikernes, through his local popularity and

⁷⁷ Moynihan and Didrik, 190.

the publication of interviews with him in the work, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, quickly created a space for himself as a leader of the black metal movement and breeder of those ideologies that have solidified its placing as an extreme form of heavy metal.

Virkenes is described as “a perverse self-styled aristocrat, outside the law, who enacted his libertine fantasies of destruction with a belief in immunity for punishment for his crimes”⁷⁸ in Norway. His history begins with the creation of bands like Mayhem and Burzum that are considered the foundation of the black metal movement in Norway. His fame with Burzum as a musician and with Mayhem as a murderer and church-burner have further strengthened his place as a controversial figurehead in the history and the discourse of the genre. Even until today, his status as a black metal icon is undisputed. Moynihan and Söderlind explain that,

Varg’s status as spokesman or figurehead is fully warranted by his own history, for he does appear to be the personality who gave focus to the ideas welling within the scene, and led people into action... The combination of strong belief in his own role, along with his impressive ability to incitingly voice his opinions, have both ensured Varg’s continued influence, even from behind bars.⁷⁹

Varg very openly expresses his views on race, Nazism and Satanism in his interviews for *Lords of Chaos*. Most of them stem from his adoration of ancient Viking religion and culture and his hatred toward Christianity as an imposed religion in Norway. In the interviews, he explains both his hatred for Christianity and his antisemitism,

That’s what we have to do, wake them up from the Jewish trance. We don’t have to kill them – that would be killing ourselves, because they [Christians] are a part of us... They just have a Jewish implant in their head which is called Christianity, which we have to get rid of. Once we get rid of that, they will be just as good as us. It’s an awakening. Wake

⁷⁸ Moynihan and Didrik, 145.

⁷⁹ Moynihan and Didrik, 149.

them up, they're sleeping. The way to wake them up is to burn the churches, desecrate graves, and all this.⁸⁰

This hatred then spreads to both the Americans and British for their war on Nazism and on its discourse,

When I was a skinhead there still weren't any colored people, but there were these punks – that was more the reason I went over to the other side. But of course the main reason is weapons. German SS helmets, Schmeizers and Mausers and all these weapons. That's what they shot British and Americans with. Great! We hated British and Americans... And I responded with hate toward American culture!... We liked the Germans, because they always had better weapons and they looked better, they had discipline. They were like Vikings... Our big hope was to be invaded by Americans so we could shoot them. The hope of war was all we lived for.⁸¹

To summarize, Moynihan and Söderlind explain that, “his stated goal is to awaken the rest of the Norse tribe from a Judeo-Christian, social-democratic slumber”⁸². But one would be foolish to believe that this could only be done by extreme, criminal acts. At the base of everything that Varg Virkenes has done and everything that he has promoted is the meta-discourse of a return to the past era of the Vikings, or a retreat into Satanism, as legitimate means of rejecting both Christianity and the modern society that it has helped to build in Norway.

The question then remains: How does a return to Viking religion and/or a retreat into Satanism serve as a means of rejecting modern society? In an interview in *Lords of Chaos*, Hendrik Möbus⁸³ explains the idea through the roots of “folkdom” and its connection to National Socialism. He says that,

⁸⁰ Moynihan and Didrik, 163.

⁸¹ Moynihan and Didrik, 156-157.

⁸² Moynihan and Didrik, 167.

⁸³ Hendrik Möbus is the founder of the German black metal band, Absurd. Like Virkenes, he was involved with killings surrounding the band and their group of fans. Unlike Virkenes, however, Möbus is a staunch advocate of Nazism and escaped to the refuge of Neo-Nazi groups in the United States until his extradition back to Germany in 2001.

‘Folkdom’ is not only made up of those with common blood. The landscape where the folk live also exerts a large influence on the character of their culture, religion, and civilization. People are molded by the landscape; at the same time there are naturally significant regional differences. Only though this confluence of blood and landscape do a specific “folkdom” and folk customs arise... In any event, German mythology is a heritage given to us that we can’t deny, and we are fascinated with every expression of the German being.⁸⁴

This connection with German mythology and a ‘shared bloodline’, of course, is highly reminiscent of Hitler’s writings and ideologies. Through this simple connection in discourse, the roots of Viking folk metal and Satanic black metal can be seen as coming from a common desire to reject Christianity and return to a previous era and religion. In this context, the following quote by Möbus, makes even more sense:

It goes without saying that National Socialism is likewise such an expression. If one looks at the Black Order of the SS without preconceptions, then one sees mostly people who believed in their vision with devotion and fanaticism and who were taken up with their mission. Finally in this regard one can no longer explain the dynamic of National Socialism as ‘Machiavellianism’ or the like, but instead one has to agree with C.G. Jung that a primordial power had newly possessed the people; the archetype of Wotan. As Hermann Rauschning⁸⁵ said, “The deepest roots of Nazism lay hidden in secret places”.⁸⁶

These “expressions” of discord with society and with Christianity are also at the base of Satanism. While many believe Satanism to be a belief in Satan as deity, the truth is that the deity of Satanism is one’s self. This is at the center of most black metal lyrics and theatrics. Even the bands that take the religion seriously recognize that there is a bit of fantasy to it (although they fully believe that their rituals and words have *real* consequences). While Satanism and a return to the Viking past of Norway seem

⁸⁴ Moynihan and Didrik, 285-286.

⁸⁵ Hermann Rauschning was a German Conservative Revolutionary who was once a part of the Nazi party but then fled Germany and later renounced Nazism.

⁸⁶ Moynihan and Didrik, 286-287.

incompatible with each other, the truth is that they both sprout from the same desire to negate Christianity. In his work, “Satanic Rituals”, Anton LeVay describes this in his explaining of the Black mass: “the traditional Black Mass would incorrectly be considered a ceremony – a pageant of blasphemy. Actually it is usually entered into for a personal need to purge oneself, via overcompensation, of inhibiting guilts imposed by Christian dogma. Thus it is a *ritual*.”⁸⁷ He then continues to explain, much like the Viking past, that the Satanic ritual is based upon an opposition to the spread of Christianity by force and is, as such, a manner of liberating oneself (at the very least mentally and psychologically) from its influences. Thus, he places Satanic ritual (and other aspects of the cult) into the historical context of the Inquisition (which itself has ties to Pagan ‘folkdom’ and thus the Viking history). He writes,

During the Inquisition, anyone who doubted the sovereignty of God and Christ was summarily considered a servant of Satan and suffered accordingly. The Inquisitors, needing an enemy, found one in the guise of witches who supposedly were subject to Satanic control. Witches were created in wholesale lots by the church from the ranks of the senile, sexually promiscuous, feeble-minded, deformed, hysterical, and anyone who happened to be of non-Christian thought or background. There was only a minute percentage of actual healers and oracles. They were likewise persecuted.⁸⁸

The goal, then, of both the Satanist, the Viking and, in some senses, the Nazi (in the context of NSBM), is to free themselves of a Western/modern, Christian ‘reality’ and to seek refuge in an opposing ideology (or even fantasy) as an expression of that freedom. LeVay confirms this idea when he says that,

The Satanist can easily invent fairy tales to match anything contained in holy writ, for his background is the very childhood fiction – the myths immemorial of all peoples and all nations. And he admits they are fairy tales. The Christian cannot – no, *dares* not – admit that his heritage is fairy tales, yet he depends on them for his pious sustenance. The Satanist maintains a storehouse of avowed fantasy gathered from all cultures and

⁸⁷ LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 17. (emphasis original)

⁸⁸ LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 31.

from all ages. With his unfettered access to logic as well, he now becomes a powerful adversary of Satan's past tormentors.⁸⁹

Much like most heavy metal then, black metal, at its core, is about power and the exercising of personal (will)power towards freedom. As many Norwegians felt powerless about the encroachment of Christianity and Western ideologies (like democracy), they found their answers in various expressions of the same type of liberating power and infused this into their music. All of these ideas, in varying shades and degrees, across national and international boundaries, are present in the macro-discourse of black metal music.

One of the main reasons *why* these ideas are all interchangeable is because, at their base, they form part of a fascist rhetoric that has been employed and perfected by proponents of fascism within the modern world system. Jason Stanley, in his work *How Fascism Works*, explains this rhetoric in great detail. He writes,

[Fascists] justify their ideas by breaking down a common sense of history in creating a **mythic past** to support their vision for the present. They rewrite the populations shared understanding of reality by twisting the language of ideals through **propaganda** and promoting **anti-intellectualism**, attacking universities and educational systems that might challenge their ideals. Eventually, with these techniques, fascist politics creates a state of **unreality** in which conspiracy theories and fake news replace reasoned debate.

As the common understanding of reality crumbles, fascist politics makes room for dangerous and false beliefs to take root. First, fascist ideology seeks to naturalize group difference, thereby giving the appearance of natural, scientific support for a **hierarchy** of human worth. When social rankings and division solidify, fear fills in for understanding between groups. Any progress for a minority group stokes feelings of **victimhood** among the dominant population. **Law and order** politics has mass appeal, casting "us" as lawful citizens and "them," by contrast, as lawless criminals whose behavior poses an existential threat to the manhood of the nation. **Sexual anxiety** is also typical of fascist politics as the patriarchal hierarchy is threatened by growing gender equity.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 27. (emphasis original)

⁹⁰ Stanley, xvii.

This program can easily be identified almost anywhere where fascist rhetoric, and fascist politics, are present. For example, currently in the United States, given this definition, it would be easy to place the discourses of President Trump and his followers within the rhetoric of fascism. In fact, the placing of his discourse within this rhetoric *actually* helps it to make a semblance of sense and it begins to cease to appear as incoherent ramblings. In the United States, the “mythic past” speaks to a ‘white’ nation that once held power by majority and ‘advanced’ civilization through their contribution to the modern nation. The use of “propaganda”, like the slogan “Make America Great Again” (also a reference to the mythic past), is wide-spread and a simple look at the President’s tweets could easily display the needed “anti-intellectualism” (Fake News!). For those that share a common sense of reality and rationality, this system has created a system of “unreality” where things like asbestos, which were considered to be dangerous, are now suddenly safe again (at least within the rhetoric). The “mythic past” then reinforces an imagined “hierarchy” where white men are naturally chosen to lead the United States (and the household) and the loss of their position as such created the feelings of “victimhood” and “sexual anxiety” as minorities and women gain more and more equal rights. Ultimately, the discourse of “law and order” appears where the hierarchy of law-abiding, law-creating white men reclaim their place as enforcers of the law against those minorities and women who refuse to follow it.

In the case of Varg Vikernes and the black metal movement in Norway, a similar fascist rhetoric is easily identified. Here, once again, white males of “Viking” descent are victims of the modern world system that has allowed for the equality of minorities (especially Jews) and has stripped them of both their political power and their personal, religious histories (as Vikings). While Varg himself has *no* political

party nor is part of a political party, his only *real* influence is through the use of black metal as a means of propaganda in his fight to undo ‘reality’ and to replace it with his conspiracy theories and fascist rhetoric. Unlike Möbus, who has taken real action in joining the Nazi party, Varg can simply be seen as a person who has gained a platform for his nonsense through his music and, even more so, through his heinous crimes and the resulting news coverage of such.

It is important to note here that the desire to question Modernity and Western thought and their stronghold on our current socio-political reality lies at the bottom of *both* the fascist rhetoric and the more innocuous philosophies of Heidegger, Nietzsche and, by extension, the heavy metal community. The main difference is that the fascist rhetoric, as explained by Jason Stanley, creates a sense of “us” verses “them” and, through the separation of social classes, attempts to restructure our reality into a hierarchy where one group rules over the rest (i.e., the final solution of Hitler and the Nazi party). On the other hand, philosophy and the expression of such in art and music has as an objective, as I have mentioned, an “opening of the eyes” where individuals and societies can recognize the limits of Western thought and Modernity in an attempt to make conscious changes (both political and social) *within* the agreed upon, rational understanding of ‘reality’. While the first desires to replace reality with a fascist hierarchy, the second desires to repair reality and to improve the socio-political situation of the masses.

Now, however, that this macro-discourse and its ties to Nazism can be grasped in their proper context as fascist politics, the question arises as to what this has to do with El Salvador. How can a tropical, Central American country that is so far away from this conflict in Norway have any use for such a discourse? In what way is this discourse molded into local, micro-discourses? The answer to these questions is two-

fold. The first way that a micro-discourse is created is through a common connection with National Socialism and a desire for solving contemporary socio-political problems. This micro-discourse is found in the connection between black metal figures like Varg Vikernes, international political figures like Adolf Hitler and local political figures of the same ideologies like General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. This connection is easily made through the understanding of their discourses as a shared fascist rhetoric that transcends national borders, ideas of race and, ultimately, common sense. But it is, overall, connected to a larger feeling of powerlessness within the Salvadoran community as a whole. This chapter is concerned mainly with this micro-discourse.

The second micro-discourse is much less violent in nature and has a different end in mind. In this micro-discourse, a return to the ‘tribal’ or ‘pre-Colombian’ era, when the Mayan-Pipil tribes ruled Salvadoran territory, is fantasized in song and stage performance and hopes to raise consciousness around socio-political issues that surround both the indigenous and the modern ‘Salvadoran’ citizen. This discourse is steeped in the creation of a national identity that seeks to both involve and reject its indigenous past. I will explore this discourse in depth in the following chapter as it is important to understand that, while Nazism and Hitler are both present in El Salvador, it would be a grave error to believe that these are the only possible outcomes of a meta-discourse that is concerned with a validation of the past and a re-writing of the present. Nonetheless, it is essential to understand both the brighter and darker sides of these issues – the fascist rhetoric of dictators and would-be dictators, of course, occupying the darker side.

Black Metal roots in El Salvador

As with many contemporary socio-political issues in El Salvador, the understanding of the macro-discourse of Nazism and its ties to contemporary death-squads is linked to the overwhelming presence of the Salvadoran street gangs. The *Marasalvatrucha* and *18s*, through a mafia-esque style of drug-running, gun-pushing, violent and public murders, rape, blackmail, charging of “rent”⁹¹ and an overall system of terrorizing its fellow citizens has, unfortunately, put El Salvador back on the map in the eye of the international press.

A true menace to society, the Salvadoran gangs have created such a commotion that even the international community is struggling to find answers to the problem. As I have previously mentioned, the Salvadoran government legally labeled the gangs as “terrorist organizations” in an obvious effort to garner support from the international community for its increasingly harsh tactics to put the gangs to rest. However, in a country with a history of genocide and a lack of capital punishment, it is extremely difficult to control such a powerful force while the jails fill to overflowing and the gangs continue to gain more ground. A large part of the problem, however, is that the local government, and the world as whole, has trouble understanding the discourse of the street gangs and, as a result, has difficulty feeling empathy for them.

While it is true that the street gang is *extremely* violent and lawless and that they lack an overall political ideology to effect socio-political change, what most do not see is that their main discourse is one of survival. For the street gangs, many of its

⁹¹ Rent, or *renta*, is a system of blackmail that is charged to store owners and neighbors for the ‘protection’ of their business or home from rival gangs. Supposedly, the paying of rent ensures that the local gang will stop other factions or gangs from hurting the payee. Unfortunately, the inability or lack of desire to pay ensures violence from the same faction offering the protection.

members have grown up in extreme poverty, in neighborhoods that were dangerous before their arrival and without their nuclear families – their mothers and fathers many times abandoning them to flee to the United States for a better life where they were either unwilling or, in the majority of cases, unable to bring their children with them or to bring them legally. Within this context, the severity of the violence and the discourse of violence as a means of survival can be better understood, although it could never rationally be condoned. This discourse can never be undone as long as the “us” (law-abiding citizens) and the “them” (violent criminals) rhetoric pervades in the attempt to understand and to fix the issues.

The inability to find a rational solution to the both the ills that have created the street gangs and the persistence of such in society has created a relative socio-political monster that reaches every class of Salvadoran and has intertwined itself into the local reality – so much so that the ideas of groups, like the Human Rights organizations that are attempting to create a discourse in which rehabilitation and reintroduction into society are key elements of eliminating the gangs, are all but rejected and even met with some hostility from the affected community. In such an urgent situation, many Salvadorans have turned a blind eye to (if not openly supported) the formation of contemporary death squads, like the *Sombra Negra* (Black Shadow), by off-duty, vigilante police and military officers who roam the streets assassinating anyone they believe to be connected to the gangs. The official post-slaying reports – of course – are always in the vein of an *enfrentamiento* or “shoot-out” resulting in the death of the “gang members”, even though eye-witness accounts often confirm late-night home raids and execution-style killings. This, of course, is a direct result of the “us” versus “them” mentality where one section of Salvadoran society is seen as ‘law-abiding’ and the street gangs as ‘law-breaking’ (a discourse which is engrained due to figures

like General Maximiliano Hernández). While on the surface the discourse ‘makes sense’, the fact that the ‘law-abiding’ citizens belong to the established upper and middle classes and the ‘law-breaking’ citizens belong to the lower classes should be a direct point of interest. In other words, the MS13 and poorest of the country *are not* the only ones who break the laws (as the embezzlement of millions of dollars from the government, and by extension from the people, from former Presidents of the Republic should be enough to illustrate) but that the breaking of the law within this group is seen as an inherent trait of their social class and, ultimately, questions the hierarchy of society, as it has been established.

Where conflict is common place and extreme violence is not only a daily reality but a palpable reality, where dead and dismembered bodies are *literally* littering the streets *and* the front pages of local media, it is not a wonder that the violence present in heavy metal and its more extreme forms – like black metal – seem tame to what the Salvadoran actually sees and experiences on a daily basis. The overwhelming impotence felt by the average Salvadoran can be seen as a factor that contributes to the popularity of heavy metal and extreme forms of music in the region (although this is a rather large over-simplification)⁹². What can actually be seen though is the funneling of wider, international macro-discourses in black metal taken and reduced to a local imagining or micro-discourse.

Furthermore, disillusionment with politicians and the local religious clergy have led to the further expansion of anti-government, anti-imperialistic and anti-

⁹² I use the phrase “can be seen as a factor” for the reason that there simply does not exist any formal set of data to show the popularity of black metal in El Salvador to other places (especially because many black metal bands strive to remain ‘underground’ and out of the public eye). One could compare the amount of bands from one country or one region to another but these would only be bands that are registered on websites like the “Encyclopaedia Metallum”. My assertions are based upon personal observations and the interviews that I conducted with bands and fans.

clerical ideas within the community. While some portions of the population express their distaste through social protest and the gangs through the perpetuation of violence, the metalhead uses the stage and the discourses of heavy metal to deal with the reality around them. Part of this, then, is the idea, based upon desperation, that an extermination of the street gangs through brutal police and military intervention *could be* a good thing. A result of the “us” versus “them” mentality is that the “them” must go, even by violent means. While certain bands attempt to write violent lyrics as a cathartic means of dealing with the real violence present in their daily lives, black metal bands, as in Norway, seek to find an answer in *actual* violent reprisal in the ideas of Hitler and other fascists who believe that the elimination of the “them” will correct the victimhood of the “us” and restore the “proper” hierarchy of society. This discourse is present in Salvadoran society, as I intend to show, in the fascist discourses of General Maximiliano Hernández, who perpetrated a genocide that was dependent upon the rhetoric of the “us” (white, European Salvadorans) versus the “them” (indigenous, communist Salvadorans) in the 1930s, which have survived within the same fascist rhetoric of right-wing political groups and their sympathizers. With this in mind, it is little shock to anyone, black metal bands, like *Malignant Wizard* in El Salvador, include quotes of Adolf Hitler on the inside of their album covers, even though they are so far removed from the locality of the discourse. The problem, then, that occurs, at least in El Salvador, is when these general imaginings are then taken as serious answers to contemporary socio-political issues. In other words, the problem occurs when the fantastic becomes reality and talking becomes action.



Figure 3

[A stronger race, will lead the weak races so that the impulse of life ,will crush the weak and leave room for the strong. A.H.]

My first encounter with this local discourse was in March of 2014, sitting in a bar called “Medieval” in a middle-class neighborhood of San Salvador, where I was suddenly made aware of the presence of Hitler in the Salvadoran heavy metal scene. I

had only just begun my research into the local scene and it came as quite a shock to me. Sitting across from a radio DJ who played rock ballads on the then only rock station in El Salvador, we sipped local beers and listened to Pearl Jam across the bar speakers as I questioned him about the local scene. We talked about the gang problems that have plagued the country and that some people have confused with the heavy metal movement because of both groups' affinity for tattoos and death iconography. When probed about the question of the *pandillero* (gang members) in El Salvador, the DJ eventually got straight to his point, "Hitler tenía razón. Hay que exterminarlos" [Hitler was right. They need to be exterminated.].

What he was referring to was not a local imagining of a discourse born in Germany and reborn in Norwegian black metal, but actually a local discourse influenced by local histories and sprinkled with ideas from heavy metal and connections to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The irony, of course, for someone in Central America – which Hitler himself describes as a society only capable of being "culture-bearing" and never "culture-creating" on top of being inferior to its "Aryan" neighbors to the north⁹³ – to pick and choose ideologies from such a discourse, escapes my misguided friend (who asserts to have read *Mein Kampf* but whose knowledge of its contents refutes the claim) and those who agree with his analysis. Nonetheless, the discourse for a revival of genocide is a reality in El Salvador that cannot be ignored. While it is inspired by extreme right-wing memory groups, as we will see, it is becoming an increasingly popular socio-political idea that the mass slaughter or genocide of the gang members, and even their family members, is not

⁹³ In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes that "if we were to divide mankind into three groups, the founders of culture, the bearers of culture, the destroyers of culture, the Aryan would be considered as the representative of the first group. (290). On page 286, he speaks of Central and South America and that any mixing with these races (with Germans) would cause, "(a) Lowering of the level of the higher race; (b) Physical and intellectual regression and hence the beginning of a slowly but surely progressing sickness". His belief that Latin Americans were inferior to Germans is unquestionable.

only tolerable but even a desirable answer to the problem posed by the ‘lawlessness’ of this specific group of Salvadorans.

Part of the reason that this has become a desirable answer (and why it is not only specific to right-wing memory groups) is the overall feeling of helplessness felt by many Salvadorans. This helplessness is sometimes felt even harder by heavy metal musicians and fans who are even more stigmatized by their own society because of their clothes and tattoos. Because many of the gangs use tattoos as a means of identifying themselves, the military and police force often use them as an excuse to stop and harass any member of society. Such is the case for musicians like Alejandro “Chele” Paredes, guitarist for deathcore band Virginia Clemm, who was beat up by cops in front of his house simply because he is covered with tattoos. The police used the excuse, as usual, that they thought that he was related to the gangs (even though rock/metal tattoos are fairly different from those used by the gangs). His feelings of impotence, or powerlessness, of being stuck between a gang and the police/military force that battles with them, is felt throughout all levels of Salvadoran society, but even harder amongst the middle-class (where most of the musicians come from). Powerlessness is often one of the feelings that leads quickest to cruelty. And in the case of Salvadorans, this powerlessness, and sense of victimhood, has led to a search for an answer to the gang problems that has landed back upon the old fascists idea of elimination, or in other words, genocide.

A History of Genocide in El Salvador

Unfortunately, the idea of genocide is nothing new to El Salvador. In fact, most of those who espouse this nascent discourse base themselves on the local history of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez who, in the early 1930s – around the same time as Hitler’s rise to power – established a dictatorship in El Salvador on the

back of a genocide of 10,000 to 30,000⁹⁴ indigenous and ladino agricultural workers. Martínez and his *matanza*, or massacre, in 1932 has become the centerpiece of both right-wing and left-wing discourses about the Salvadoran political past. Recently, however, the resurgence of his figure in the Salvadoran mentality has focused more around his brutality against lawlessness rather than the genocide that was perpetrated at his command. Nonetheless, the re-popularization of his figure, especially amongst the middle class, opens a space for the discourse of violence and genocide as a means for solving social unrest.

For those who are unfamiliar with Maximiliano's dictatorship, commonly known as *el martinato*, it is important to understand the history behind his rise to power and his continued mark on the Salvadoran consciousness. General Maximiliano, commonly referred to by his surname Martínez, was an astute young military leader in the short-lived cabinet of President Arturo Araujo (March 1931 – December 1931). He was “chosen” to lead the country by the military after a military coup displaced Araujo as President. While there is still much speculation as to the level of his involvement in the coup itself⁹⁵, Martínez perpetually claimed to *not* have taken part in the coup – a position that was very necessary in order to win the much desired (and much needed) recognition of his presidency by the United States government⁹⁶. Nonetheless, shortly after his seemingly ‘reluctant’ taking of the

⁹⁴ Numbers for the quantity killed in the repression of 1932 vary amongst scholars. Most have settled on the wide range of anywhere between 10,000 and 30,000. However, Thomas R. Anderson, in his extensive work *El Salvador, 1932*, asserts that “la cifra de 10,000 nos suena más verosímil que otros cálculos más elevados” [the figure of 10,000 seems more plausible than other more elevated calculations] (267).

⁹⁵ While Martínez was ‘imprisoned’ during the actual coup, many people believe that this imprisonment was part of the coup itself and simply a way of keeping Martínez’s name clear of any involvement.

⁹⁶ Martínez understood that, in order to succeed as dictator, he would need the United States to validate his presidency. This would ensure that other countries, including the US, would continue their relations with El Salvador. Erik Ching explains that “one of the most formidable opponents [to Martínez] was the U.S. government, which by the end of December [of 1931] had concluded that Martínez’s rise to power violated the Washington Treatise of 1923, and thus his regime would not receive diplomatic

presidency, a “communist uprising”⁹⁷ occurred in the Western departments of the country, which Martínez responded to with a quick⁹⁸ and brutal repression that is today still remembered simply by the date, 1932.

As already stated, this *matanza* would become the focal point of many disagreements between the right-wing and left-wing parties of El Salvador. Naturally, as “subjectively constituted memory groups”⁹⁹, each party had its official twist on the narrative of the massacre. For the right, the *matanza* was a necessary evil that helped rid the country of the communist element. For the left, the fact that those targeted in the massacre belonged to the poor *campesino* and indigenous classes was proof that the local, oligarchy of elite coffee planters and landowners¹⁰⁰ had a vested interest in maintaining power in the country and had no qualms in utilizing the military to keep the established class system in check. Regardless of party, however, as Jeffery L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago explain, it is “beyond the ravages of official

recognition.”(252) With this lack of recognition in mind, Martínez took an anti-imperial (i.e., Anti-United-States) stand and sought assistance from other European and Latin American countries. This stance (and his resulting, successful defiance of the US) made him extremely popular and continues to be a factor in the persistence of his image in El Salvador.

⁹⁷ I place “communist uprising” in parenthesis here because there is really not enough evidence to prove that the uprising was at all sponsored by the communist party. In fact, the official party confirms that they had no dealings in El Salvador at the time. What really was at work was a group of local, leftist (communist) politicians and intellectuals who were attempting to sway the rural masses towards a more liberal vote in election time.

⁹⁸ The violent repression itself only lasted a period of “roughly two weeks” (Ching, 289).

⁹⁹ “Subjectively constituted memory groups” are groups of people, or parties, that have a common understanding of *how* and *why* specific events occurred. They are subjective because they are created within the discourse of an ideology specific to that group. In other words, leftist parties like the FMLN remember the events of 1932 different than the right-wing parties like ARENA. We often find that the real truth is somewhere in the middle. Lindo-Fuentes, et al. explains that these groups “had vested interests in how the past was told. For some memory groups, 1932 provided a model to be followed; for others, it was a lesson in what not to do. The story changed from group to group and from decade to decade... Memory groups sought to legitimize contemporary political positions with socially sanctioned interpretations of the past. Thus, memory was inherently political and politics was based on historical memory” (215).

¹⁰⁰ This interest was so heavy that these classes formed what Gould and Lauria-Santiago call a “counterrevolutionary coalition”. They explain that this coalition involved, “landed elite groups, coffee planters from mid-sized plantations, cattle ranchers, the church, and the military”. Also, these groups, “shared an aristocratic ethos which held Indians and rural workers in contempt as semi-barbarians.” (210)

memory and the inadequacy of personal memory”¹⁰¹ that the massacre has become a cornerstone of the Salvadoran consciousness and a leading focal point of research in the country. What is important to understand though, beyond the individual historical details of the events themselves, is not the continued influence that the figure of Martínez has had on politics *per se*, but the continued resurgence of his figure as an ideological figure during times of socio-political difficulty in the country.

The work, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador*, reminds us that over forty years after the massacre, during the recent Civil War, “one of the most prominent right-wing death squads called itself the Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez Brigade, after the president who oversaw the Matanza”¹⁰². And even today, in a search for answers in a country that has a seemingly unending streak of high violence and crime rates, General Martínez’s name appears on internet chat boards and social media sites as a possible answer to the socio-political ills of the country. In some pictures, he is quoted with his famous laws detailing the methods for dealing with criminals, a discourse that helps to make sense of his government’s recent decision to label the gangs as “terrorist groups”:

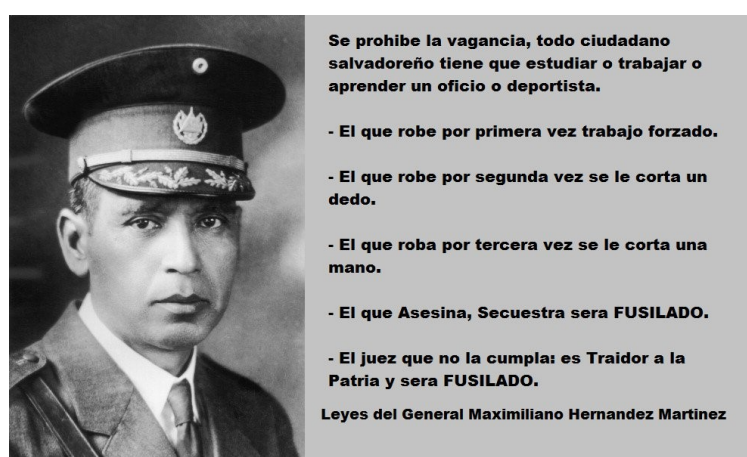


Figure 4

¹⁰¹ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 153.

¹⁰² Lindo-Fuentes, et al., 242.

[Vagrancy is prohibited, every Salvadoran citizen has to study or work or learn a trade or sport.

- He who robs the first time will get forced labor.
- He who robs a second time will have a finger cut off.
- He who robs a third time will have a hand cut off.
- He who kills or kidnaps, will be killed by firing squad.
- The judge who does not comply with these orders: is a traitor to the fatherland and will be killed by firing squad.

Laws of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martínez]

For many, it was exactly Martínez's careful "balanced use of the 'iron hand' and the 'velvet glove'"¹⁰³, that made the *martinato* not only successful, but a period of Salvadoran history to which, in some senses, the government should aspire. In this discourse, the fact that Martínez perpetrated what one author calls, "a form of genocide"¹⁰⁴, that devastated the rural population of the Western half of the country, is overshadowed by Martínez's success as a President and his ability to control the country during a time of socio-political turmoil (the short presidencies of his predecessors being sufficient proof of the instability of political power in the country).

This success, as I have read it, can be simplified into three overarching factors, which I will briefly examine. First, General Maximiliano Martínez was a very astute politician, but even more so, his personality and populist leanings facilitated his success both with politicians and citizens in general. Second, Martínez's strong anti-imperialist discourse and his ability to "stand up" to the pressure of the United States solidified his popularity among the ruling class and earned the faith of the international community in his leadership skills. And, third, the manner in which he dealt with the uprising in the West, after the initial repression, showed (supposedly) that while his dictatorship was built on the back of genocide, his goal as President, even if in a dictatorial fashion, was to "establish discipline, order and unity of

¹⁰³ Ching, 252.

¹⁰⁴ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 219.

action...”¹⁰⁵ and, ultimately, to alleviate the “‘poverty of the *campesinos*’ if only to help create a situation where the communists’ message would fall upon deaf ears and future episodes of insurrection would be prevented.”¹⁰⁶ These factors, while maybe individually innocuous, became effective through their implantation within a fascist politics that attempted to rewrite the reality of Salvadoran socio-politics according to the desired aims and goals of the Martínez government.

Erick Ching describes Martínez as, “a shrewd political player who constantly placed himself in the right place at the right time to achieve a rapid climb up the political ladder, from director of the military school in 1930 to president just fifteen months later.”¹⁰⁷ Part of this shrewdness, was his ability to maintain a popular image among opposing classes and between clashing discourses. This task was not easy given surmounting pressures from different groups within, and outside of, El Salvador. We must remember that Martínez was able to maintain power with opposition from the left (*comunistas*), the rural labor class, other young military leaders who were hungry for power, the United States government, and the oligarchy of powerful land-owning elites. This required the ability not only to be ‘in the right place at the right time’ but also to know how to do and to say ‘the right thing’ in the given situation – always depending on from where the threat against his power and political unification was coming.

To this end, Martínez “consistently displayed a populist style”¹⁰⁸ that he would eventually mix with his own adaptation of nationalism. This nationalism was, mainly, in response to the clash between capital and labor that had inspired a communist party to form within the country. It was Martínez’s goal, as a populist, to place himself and

¹⁰⁵ Ching, 265.

¹⁰⁶ Ching, 305.

¹⁰⁷ Ching, 251.

¹⁰⁸ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 140.

his regime in a “neutral position”¹⁰⁹ between the two, which a nationalist position heavily facilitated. Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, et al. explain that Martínez:

portrayed his government as defending the rule of law and protecting all Salvadorans, rich and poor, Indian and Ladino¹¹⁰ alike. [He] repeatedly identified the cause of the rebellion as the crisis in ‘relations between capital and labor,’ a classic example of fascist rhetoric. Benito Mussolini in Italy and other architects of fascism described the authoritarian state as the only entity strong enough to force capital and labor to collaborate with one another for the betterment of the nation and thereby avoid a dangerous class struggle. Following that model, Martínez said that a strong and interventionist state in El Salvador would ‘harmonize’ relations between class antagonists and solve the problem of the communist insurrection.¹¹¹

Therefore, when it came to speaking of the *matanza*, Martínez made sure to empathize both with the land-owner (capital) and the *campesino* (labor). In one of his many speeches, Martínez stated that, “it was painful for my Government to have had to use such severe measures of military repression... but they were indispensable to protect society, property and family¹¹²... This exacting work does not have to reoccur... in El Salvador there is only one justice, equal for everyone, poor and rich, knowledgeable and ignorant.”¹¹³ His ability to spin the populist and nationalistic rhetoric in his favor is what allowed him to fulfill, what Thomas P. Anderson calls, “his role as savior.”¹¹⁴

This ability to pander to two opposing parties was not limited to the borders of El Salvador. While toeing the line of Salvadoran nationalism, Martínez recognized that the success of his government depended highly upon the backing of the United

¹⁰⁹ Ching, 335.

¹¹⁰ Ladino here refers to those Salvadorans of mixed-blood (Indigenous and Spanish). In El Salvador, the term *mestizo* is preferred.

¹¹¹ Lindo-Fuentes, et al., 224.

¹¹² Note here that all three of these ideas (Society, Property and Family) are built upon the very same Western Epistemologies that both Martínez and the heavy metal community are questioning.

¹¹³ Ching, 305.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, 150.

States. As a study by Kenneth J. Grieb demonstrates, throughout the first years of his presidency, Martínez continued to appeal to the United States for recognition of his presidency while simultaneously defying the 1923 Washington Treaties and even defaulting on a loan from the United States for \$21 million dollars. He accomplished this by “[presenting] his government as a defender against lawlessness and portrayed himself as a proud Salvadoran defying arrogant Americans who presumed to know what was best for his country.”¹¹⁵ The resulting discourse of anti-Imperialism from this conflict would eventually weave itself into his nationalistic discourse and still remain a part of the Salvadoran consciousness – even until today.

Nonetheless, it was only able to do so because of Martínez’s overall success. As Grieb explains, “the fact remains that even in the face of a stronger stance a leader with sufficient determination and adequate domestic strength could effectively resist the American diplomatic pressure.”¹¹⁶ The result being that “the collapse of the treaty and the successful defiance of the United States by Martínez ushered in a new era in Central American politics, making possible the rise of a new series of dictators.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, it is no surprise, that a country that has been dominated by anti-imperialist rhetoric for almost a century, while simultaneously cooperating with imperial powers (at least economically), could look for inspiration in someone like Martínez, who was able to ‘beat the United States’.

This information, though, still leaves us at the impasse of *how* exactly a dictator with severely harsh tactics for controlling his country coupled with a history of perpetrating a massacre could become popular *even with those who were directly affected by the massacre*. Or even how he eventually won over the United States and

¹¹⁵ Lindo-Fuentes, et al., 225.

¹¹⁶ Grieb, 170.

¹¹⁷ Grieb, 172.

democratic powers by “tout[ing] democracy in a nondemocratic system without causing it to fall apart under the weight of its own paradox.”¹¹⁸ As for the indigenous and rural laborer, Martínez immediately created a system of *mejoramiento social* [social betterment] that oversaw the implementation of social reforms directed at the very community that he had so strongly repressed. The system, although in large part a failure, provided housing to many of those affected by the massacre and sought to rebuild the western municipalities involved in the incidents of 1932. But, unlike many of his predecessors and even contemporaries, Martínez went ‘above and beyond’ to include the indigenous people in ‘his’ society by *not* “prohibiting the use of the Nahuatl-Pipil language... [and actually] actively tried to revivify it” through allowing it to be taught “in all western Salvadoran schools.”¹¹⁹ Additionally, he “permitted the *cofradías*¹²⁰ to celebrate their annual religious festivals.”¹²¹

This stance towards the indigenous communities served a two-fold purpose for Martínez. First, it distanced the indigenous and rural worker from the communists who, at least in the official version, perpetrated the uprising. And, second, it provided legitimacy to his government in the face of accusations that the repression was perpetrated against a specific ethnic group. In the first instance, “by distinguishing between *campesinos* and communists and by ignoring ethnicity, Martínez fit the military’s actions during the Matanza into a populist program.”¹²² This ‘program’ made it appear that the attacks on the Western ‘workers’ were *not* related to the

¹¹⁸ Ching, 281.

¹¹⁹ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 253.

¹²⁰ *Cofradías* are Indigenous organizations that were started during the colonial period in Central America. These organizations represent the interests of the Indigenous tribes and citizens. They also function in the gathering of goods for the needy, in providing education for the Indigenous and in celebrating the Indigenous religious festivals. In the past, the *cofradías* were often limited and sometimes even banned depending on who was in power at the time. Martínez tried to build a strong relationship with the *cofradías* for the many reasons discussed in this chapter.

¹²¹ Ching, 329.

¹²² Lindo-Fuentes, et al., 224.

ethnicity of those who were killed. Therefore, Martínez could blame the killings on the “myth of communist treachery”¹²³ and escape the condemnation of the international community who was paying close attention to what was happening within the country. Due to this two-part stance, Gould and Lauria-Santiago explain that “the military repression ‘of great severity’ – namely the mass execution of ‘communists’ – fell within the international boundaries of acceptable action on the part of the government faced with lower-class rebellion” and “thus Martínez’s regime suffered no condemnation from European or American governments.”¹²⁴

The only problem here being, of course, that ethnicity *did* have much to do with the choosing of who was killed and who was allowed to live during the repression. Gould and Lauria-Santiago continue by explaining that

if we limit ourselves to the élite understanding of their [the Ladino’s] own racial superiority and their subjective understanding of race as determined by phenotype and skin color rather than history or culture, we can state that one ethnic group led by generally lighter-skinned ladino officers ordered the execution of people whom they saw as darker and believed to be ‘racially’ inferior, even if many of the victims would have considered themselves ladinos or non-indians. In this broader definition of race and racism, the regime’s primary motive – to curse the insurrection and strike fear and terror into the hearts and minds of the rural poor – fused with an intent framed by racism and overdetermined by class hatred – with a result that killed thousands of people in a form of genocide.¹²⁵

So, while Martínez in his populist, nationalist style was able to convince much of the international community and even the Salvadoran and rural/indigenous workers themselves that the repression and massacre was a ‘necessary evil’ against the encroachment of ‘communism’ on his newborn regime, a close examination of the

¹²³ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 214.

¹²⁴ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 237.

¹²⁵ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, 221.

facts (regardless of which political memory group one belongs to) shows that this was not the case.

Consequently, we have a military dictatorship that is so successful not only in its repression of its citizenry but also in the convincing of said citizenry that it is ‘safer’ with the regime taking care of them like a proverbial ‘*buen padre*’ [good father]. This regime – because of its actual successes in solidifying power, obtaining a modicum of internal peace (compared to previous presidencies) and its ability to overcome international imperialist pressures – would pass into the collective memory of the Salvadoran people as point of reference for any resurgence of ‘criminality’, ‘terrorism’ or even ‘communism.’¹²⁶ During times of socio-political peace, such a power is not needed. However, during any upheaval, like the civil war or the contemporary epidemic of gang-related violence, the *martinato* could be considered one of many answers to the problem.

‘Death squads’ then are a result of a general desire for a ‘complete extermination’ of those deemed “undesirable” or simply “too dangerous to live”. Once the process in which human life is devalued begins, however, it is hard to tell where it will end – as we have definitely seen in the past. The most famous case, at least in international collective memory, being that of Adolf Hitler in Germany. Given the history of a ‘successful’ nationalistic, populist dictator who “dabbled more and more in spiritualism and the occult”¹²⁷ in El Salvador and the international fame garnered by Hitler, it is not much of a stretch between the ideologies of accepting Martínez and his policies and the subjective picking and choosing of doctrines espoused by Hitler. Nonetheless, it is necessary to understand that the affinity for

¹²⁶ Martínez mentions ‘terrorism’ as part of his reasoning for the massacres in 1932. I revisit this connection with today’s street gangs in the conclusion of this chapter.

¹²⁷ Anderson, 151.

Hitler's doctrine is not an "official" line of any particular party (as of yet), but a specific cultural phenomenon that is the result of two particular social forces coming together: right-wing memory groups and a well-read heavy metal scene that has an affinity for Norwegian black metal.

Martínez, Hitler and Virkenes

Still, Martínez and Hitler have more in common than just similar styles of ruling. Beyond their effective use of propaganda, their control of their citizenry and their willingness to use violence to silence their opposition, Martínez and Hitler shared similar ideologies (i.e., Fascism) and, mainly, ideas that could make a bridge between the two easier to understand. One such idea was the rejection of egoism by both dictators. Erik Ching explains that, "Martínez believed that most of the world's problems originated with egotistical people... [and he] denounced egoism in almost every one of his addresses."¹²⁸ As an opposing philosophy, the dictator offered what he called "altruism". Martínez says in one address, "It is necessary to develop an altruist philosophy... a philosophy based on truth that clarifies man's purpose on earth that allows him to pursue that mission in accordance with the divine plan, with a *pure* mind and *pure* emotions."¹²⁹ Erik Ching clarifies that in this view, "Altruistic men are 'happy, loving men'... [that] are culture leaders dedicated to service."¹³⁰

Similarly, Hitler himself delineates his problems with egoism in *Mein Kampf*. He explains that "in the most primitive living creatures the instinct for self-preservation does not go beyond concern for their own ego."¹³¹ As a primitive drive, egoism is then something we must overcome with what Hitler calls "Idealism". He

¹²⁸ Ching, 283.

¹²⁹ Ching, 283. (emphasis mine)

¹³⁰ Ching, 283.

¹³¹ Hitler, 296.

explains that “true idealism is nothing but the subordination of the interests and life of the individual to the community, and this in turn is the precondition for the creation of organizational forms of all kinds, it corresponds in its innermost depths to the ultimate will of Nature.”¹³² It is not a far stretch for a dictator like Martínez who had admittedly been inspired by Mussolini to have probably been familiar with the works of Hitler (that were published immediately prior to Martínez’s taking power). And while Martínez calls his answer “altruism” and Hitler calls his “idealism”, the fact is that both ideas require a subordination of the self in order to serve the community – the ‘greater good’. The problem, as we would see over the course of both dictatorships, is that, for those who would not subordinate themselves of their own volition, the state would be happy to step in and offer “assistance” by force. These ideas, more than likely springing from their common military background, are only some amongst a list of commonalities between the two that showcase a strong link between them.

Proving a similar link between Hitler and Norwegian artists like Varg Virkenes is also fairly simply as one bases their ideas on those of the other. However, providing a link between Norwegian black metal artists like Virkenes and a Salvadoran dictator from 1932 like General Martínez proves a little hard. The level at which the two approach each other is on the level of discourse. Both Martínez and Virkenes pride themselves on the ‘re-writing’, or at least ‘re-thinking’, of ideas and ideologies. This is based upon their mutual affinity for ‘extreme’ – or better, alternate – thoughts and philosophies. For Martínez, these alternate philosophies consisted in his religious beliefs.

¹³² Hitler, 299.

Martínez “subscribed to theosophy, a philosophical/religious framework based in Buddhist and Brahmanic traditions that adhered to Pantheism and a belief in reincarnation.”¹³³ As a part of these alternate philosophies, Martínez “was a teetotaling vegetarian who ascribed to *cromoferapia*, or cure by colors.”¹³⁴ These beliefs informed Martínez’s way of viewing the world and, naturally, his politics. Erik Ching explains that Martínez, “fancied himself a philosophical leader of the nation.”¹³⁵ As a non-Catholic, this might seem difficult in a country dominated by the religion like El Salvador. What facilitated this belief however was his domination of the power system in the country as dictator. This allowed him to indulge his philosophical fantasies, even if they were not understood by those around him.

Like Martínez, Varg Virkenes is a staunch believer in alternate philosophies. Apart from his fluctuating affinities for Nazism and Satanism, Virkenes denies the holocaust and holds strong beliefs in the existence of UFOs. These beliefs, at their root, are ways in which Virkenes seeks to distinguish himself from popular, contemporary thought and social reality in Norway. As it concerns the Holocaust, Mattias Gardell explains that, Virkenes seeks to “find an audience (outside the National Socialist scene) [that is] receptive to his ideas of a ‘Holohoax’” and, in order to do so, “he would need to find free-thinkers who are willing to accept as true knowledge things that most others would reject.”¹³⁶ Gardell reiterates this idea when he says,

I think that part of the reason Aryan revolutionaries are so receptive to these theories is related to the fact that both UFO technologies and white Nationalist Socialist racists hold as valid knowledge what is rejected or ridiculed by mainstream society. A believer in one kind of stigmatized knowledge tends to be receptive or open to other kinds of stigmatized knowledge – the fact that it is not accepted as true by the universities

¹³³ Ching, 285.

¹³⁴ Ching, 251.

¹³⁵ Ching, 285.

¹³⁶ Moynihan and Didrik, 190.

and mainstream media is interpreted to mean that [there] must be something to it. This might – in part – explain why white racists tend to be open to all kinds of alternative medicine, ideas of lost worlds, parapsychology, alternative religions and alternative science, including UFO theologies.¹³⁷

For both Martínez and Virkenes, these beliefs in alternate philosophies and religions (both are pantheists), inform their re-writing of the acceptable definitions of common ideologies. This is easy to see in the fact that both of them reject the common definition of the idea of ‘democracy’ and re-write it within their own philosophical worldviews. Virkenes, in his interviews, explains, “We realized that we are not ‘undemocratic,’ *they* are. We’re the democrats. What they call democracy has nothing to do with it. It’s the rule of the scum.”¹³⁸ Likewise, Martínez, as a part of his political agenda and resistance of the United States, attempted to re-write the definition of democracy. Erick Ching explains “democracy, [Martínez] insisted existed philosophically in one’s own mind, not in the public arena of government.”¹³⁹ Around this idea, he built an argument that ‘existed in three parts, or as he called them ‘logics’ (*lógicas*): people are mental beings; democracy is a mental construct; and a democratic society is a conglomeration of individuals sharing those mental constructs.”¹⁴⁰ For Martínez, this re-writing was a necessity due to the contradictions of his own politics. While this necessity existed, it is impossible to know whether or not Martínez was fully aware of it or if it was a governing influence on his philosophies. However, like Virkenes, we *can* determine that Martínez’s affinity for alternate knowledge informed all of his socio-political ideologies. While Martínez based his government around these ideas, Virkenes built a musical movement and

¹³⁷ Moynihan and Didrik, 190.

¹³⁸ Moynihan and Didrik, 171. (emphasis mine)

¹³⁹ Ching, 281.

¹⁴⁰ Ching, 282. (emphasis original)

culture on them. This movement is at the root of Norwegian black metal and the meta-discourse that it spreads around the globe. Virkenes himself confirms that “the groundwork of the black metal scene is the will to be different from the masses. That’s the main object.”¹⁴¹

Understanding that these ideas, at their core, are in reality a functional part of the discourse of fascism is crucial at this point. It is not enough to simply point out that the religious and political beliefs of Virkenes, Hitler and Martínez are similar and, in many cases, identical. What is at work here between the three is an understood fascist rhetoric that is attempting to undo the socio-political reality around them and to replace it with a fascist state that will ‘fix the problem’. Within this discourse, conspiracy theories are key. As Jason Stanley explains, “we should think of conspiracy theories as ‘aimed’ at some out-group, and in the service of some in-group. Conspiracy theories function to denigrate and delegitimize their targets, by connecting them, mainly symbolically, to problematic acts.”¹⁴² For all three of these ‘thinkers’, the use of conspiracy theories (especially those surrounding the Jews) was a manner of delegitimizing those communities that would stand in the way of their fascist politics and the advancement of their power. But, more than that, it contributes to the feelings of “victimhood” and the resulting “anti-intellectualism” necessary for the success of fascist politics.

The use of conspiracy theories is another manner of destabilizing modern, liberal discourses of reality that are spread through the university system. It is also a key in creating the sense of “unreality” where rational discourses are replaced by responses based upon fear of the targeted groups. For both Hitler and Martínez, this

¹⁴¹ Moynihan and Didrik, 171.

¹⁴² Stanley, 58.

fascist rhetoric was extremely successful (much less so for Virkenes). Ultimately, they function as a means to divide the masses. Stanley explains that “if the society is divided, however, then a demagogic politician can exploit the division by using language to sow fear, accentuate prejudice, and call for revenge against members of hated groups.”¹⁴³ It is within this context that the rewriting of liberal ideas, like democracy, are essential and function in the spread of conspiracy theories and alternate mythic pasts that serve to reinforce the same hierarchy that the fascist politicians (and fascist ideologues) are attempting to impose.

This imposition, however, is dependent upon the masses and the solidification of power within the established socio-political hierarchy. In other words, the fascist, in the end, *does* have to win over enough supporters to put his fascist plan into work (the main reason why people like Virkenes are unsuccessful and, eventually, are seen as the incoherent racists that they usually are). Stanley writes that,

Some voters are simply more attracted to a system that favors their own particular religion, race, gender, or birth position. The resentment that flows from unmet expectations can be redirected against minority groups seen as not sharing dominant traditions: goods that go to them are resented by demagogic politicians, in a zero-sum way, as taking goods away from majority groups. Some voters see such groups, rather than the behavior of economic elites, as responsible for their unmet expectations.¹⁴⁴

In Nazi Germany, this discourse was placed against the Jewish (and gypsy, amongst other) minority populations that were seen as ‘stealing’ power and goods from the German citizenry. Currently, in the United States, this discourse is present in President Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric in which the immigrant has come to the United States to “steal” resources from “rightful” (i.e., white) citizens and to

¹⁴³ Stanley, 68.

¹⁴⁴ Stanley, 73.

undermine their government (and hierarchy) with illegal activity. The placing of the MS13 at the middle of the discourse and President Trump's dehumanization of them as animals who do not deserve to live should suffice to illuminate the rhetoric that which is really at work. This rhetoric, despite the anti-imperialistic notions of many Salvadorans, is present also in El Salvador within the call for the extermination of these gangs. Here, the average Salvadoran citizen sees the gang as the 'them' that is robbing them of a dignified life, while many fail to look towards the same rich, oligarchical political parties that continue to rob the country blind while showing little concern for improving the plight of the *pueblo* – no matter how much they try to work it into their propaganda.

The Final Solution for El Salvador?

The problem here, then, is when the meta-discourse of black metal – steeped in ideologies like National Socialism and Satanism – is adapted by a local community into a micro-discourse in order to justify the mass murder of the poorest class of Salvadorans, even if they are the group that perpetuates extreme violence in the country. This can become extremely problematic if one understands that there are parts of Salvadoran society, and even the international community, that associate metalheads in El Salvador with the *maras*. This association comes from two places. First, as I have mentioned, both the gangs and the metalheads share an affinity for tattoos and the iconography of death/violence (skulls, reapers, etc.). The second place is from academic works like, Thomas Ward's, *Gangsters without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang*. As I have shown in this work, Ward tries to make a connection between the *maras* and metalheads in his explanation that the gangs spawned from the *Marasalvatrucha Stoners*, a group of metalheads in Los Angeles. While Ward fails to make a connection between a group of metal fans with

an affinity for Satanism and actual organized gang activity, he still makes the argument that the current gang started with metalheads. He tries to solidify this argument with interviews from the ‘original’ members of the Stoners group, but his interviews take their stories as truth and he makes no attempt to verify if these stories are actually true or not. In other words, he takes the stories at face value and then passes them off as undeniable truth.

Salvadoran metalheads and musicians are not completely unaware of this conflict, even if they pretend that the idea of extermination could not possibly pass over into the metal community. Gerardo José, guitar player for the now inactive band Perverso, says,

Es un error. Es una realidad [también] porque... bueno, yo nunca he asociado una cosa con la otra en realidad. Qué un metalero sea pandillero – No, jamás. Quizás la gente de afuera que no conoce en realidad que tipo de grupo es cada quien los asocia porque muchos están tatuados o muchos tienen aspecto agresivo, pero eso no tiene nada que ver. En realidad son diferente tipos de personas. Están completamente errados. Eso es en realidad como lo vemos aquí nosotros. No sé afuera si alguien lo ve afuera es porque no se ha dado cuenta en realidad que son cada tipo de grupos.

[It is a mistake. It is also a reality because... well, I have never associated one thing with the other really. That a metalhead is a gang member – No, never. Maybe the people outside that don’t know the reality of which type of group each one is might associate them because many of them are tattooed or many of them have an aggressive aspect, but that doesn’t have anything to do with it. In reality, they are different types of people. They are completely wrong. That is in reality how we see it here. I don’t know if outside someone sees it from the outside is because they haven’t found out in reality what each type of group is.]

Even though it may be an ‘error’ to confuse the two groups, the fact is that, even within the metal community, there is a semblance of recognition that the two groups have been compared and that they share characteristics that could be twisted to say that they are mutually detrimental to society. Part of this is related to the negative

stigma that metalheads have worldwide and the other part to the fact that the Salvadoran military and police force have been trained (even before the civil war) to treat people that are ‘different’ than the norm with suspicion as being leftists and/or terrorists¹⁴⁵. This is due, in part, to the continued class struggle in El Salvador and the continued presence of mass poverty pushed by rapid urbanization, emigration and the deportation policies of the United States. The *maras* are, of course, composed of young people from the lowest social classes and are most prone to (extreme) poverty. While most metalheads belong to the middle and upper classes (as demonstrated by the facility of their access to instruments, recording equipment, travel, education and employment), the *maras* are indisputably a ‘lower class’ phenomenon. But as both groups are antagonistic to society and have a discourse of violence (while one is practiced and the other is a catharsis), the connection between the two is not a far-fetched idea (especially by those unfamiliar with both communities, while someone who is familiar would never make the same connection). Paul Quijada, bassist for tribal metal group Araña and former front man of the band Perverso, explains this conflict,

En donde lo vemos en estados unidos, muchos relacionan los metaleros con los ‘rednecks’ y no es cierto y vos lo sabes. Es igual aquí. Pasa con los mareros porque es el grupo rechazado de la sociedad – con justa razón la verdad – es el grupo rechazado por la sociedad y no es nada fácil con algo que no comprendes, encasillarlo. ‘Ah, tiramos esto a la basura’.

[Where we see it in the United States, many people relate metalheads with the ‘rednecks’ and it is not true and you know it. It is the same here.

¹⁴⁵ Here we must remember that, even in 1932, Martínez maintained the discourse that those who opposed his government and those who lived differently than by his accepted ‘norms’ (i.e. socialists and *campesinos*) were ‘terrorists’. Lindo-Fuentes, et. al. explains that Martínez “condemned the communist ‘terrorists’ for having taken advantage of the simplicity and humility of the rural working poor by offering them ‘radical’ and untenable solutions to their lives of misery. He said the government had done everything in its power to prevent the ‘terrorist plan,’ but unfortunately the situation was too far advanced by the time he came to power” (223). Considering this, coupled with the North American discourse surrounding the ‘war on terror’, it then makes sense then that the contemporary government today had no qualms in labeling the street gangs as terrorists (and could potentially spread this label to other groups).

It happens with the *mareros* because it is the group that is rejected by society – with just reason really – it is the group that is rejected by society and it is not easy with something that you do not understand to pigeonhole it. ‘Ah, let’s throw this in the trash’”.]

The connections then are based along class distinctions but are also born from a despair with the current, overwhelming waves of violence that plague El Salvador. It is, then, in a space between this socio-political despair, local historical memory and an affinity for the taboo that Salvadoran black metal (in specific) gives birth to the idea of a new genocide perpetrated against a certain section – and let us be honest, a certain class – of Salvadorans. The problems with this discourse are self-evident. Although right-wing groups claim that genocide “worked” in 1932, it really only “worked” for the middle and upper classes. This type of class warfare not only did not solve the class disparity in El Salvador but perpetuated it even further and more drastically all the way into the civil war of the 1980s and even into today in the problematic of the Salvadoran Street Gangs – which are a direct result of a mixture of the North American deportation culture, the failure of the American inspired peace accords and the continued antagonism between socio-economic classes.

The fact remains that while the fantasy of genocide translated through the desperate need for a solution for the violence in El Salvador, and placed within the archaic fascist rhetoric of the *martinato*, may seem like an answer, it really is just the beginning to a new problem. For once you hand over power to roaming death squads that comprise judge, jury and executioner, where can you then draw the line? What will happen when the death squads make the same connection between the tattoo culture or shared iconography of death and skulls of the gang members and that of the heavy metal scene that others have already made? What will stop these squads from expanding their lists to other groups that present ‘a danger to society’? This should be

a specific concern for groups like Salvadoran metalheads that pride themselves in their rebellion against society and their affinity for ‘free-thinking’ and living.

The truth, however, is that genocide can really only seem appealing when it is applied to a class or group to which one does not pertain. And racial superiority always happens to apply to the race to which the articulator belongs. But when the gun turns in your own direction, these ideas suddenly lose their splendor and become a little more serious and little less “fantastical”. If the Salvadoran metalhead wants an answer to the problems posed by gang violence, increased violence is definitely the wrong direction to go. Hopefully, through an approach to understanding this discourse, it will soon be seen for what it really is and Salvadorans will look in another direction for a better answer. Until then though, the meta-discourse of Norwegian black metal will continue to inform this erroneous solution. Although this idea is not specific only to the metal community (as it is seen almost everywhere in Salvadoran society), it is definitely informed by black metal and, to my knowledge, is the only discourse which connects these ideas back to Adolf Hitler. Unfortunately, sometimes the ideas of power and liberation get out of control and discourses like these take root in places where it seems that they should not be. Nonetheless, these discourses also have other expressions – like *indigenismo* – where a more positive solution is sought and real social change becomes a centerpiece to both the music and the philosophy of heavy metal.

Chapter 3

“Indigenas sangrando libertad”: National Identity and the Phenomena of ‘Indigenismo’

Like black metal in Norway with its connections to the folklore of the Vikings, tribal metal in El Salvador is deeply rooted in the folkloric past of the local indigenous community – the Maya-Pipils¹⁴⁶. The phenomenon of the persistence of indigenous thought, customs and overall worldview throughout the Americas is commonly referred to as *indigenismo*. This phenomenon represents much more than just an artistic aesthetic but is more an alternate way of viewing the world that rejects ‘modern’, Western worldviews and bases itself upon the ideologies of those native communities that were either destroyed, colonized or otherwise dominated by the waves of conquests, colonization and republic-building in the Americas since the arrival of the Europeans in 1492. The Real Academia Española defines *indigenismo* on four different levels:

- (1) Estudio de los pueblos indios iberoamericanos que hoy forman parte de naciones en las que predomina la civilización europea;
- (2) Doctrina y partido que propugna reivindicaciones políticas, sociales y económicas para los indios y mestizos en las repúblicas iberoamericanas;
- (3) Exaltación del tema indígena americano en la literatura y el arte;
- (4) Vocablo, giro, rasgo fonético gramatical o semántico que pertenece alguna lengua indígena de América o proviene de ella.

- [(1) Study of the Ibero-American Indians that today forms part of nations in which European civilization predominates;
- (2) Doctrine and party that advocates political, social and economic demands for the Indians and mestizos in the Ibero-American republics;
- (3) Exaltation of American Indian themes in literature and art;

¹⁴⁶ Maya-Pipil is the dominate term describing the indigenous communities in El Salvador. The term originates from the presence of two major indigenous communities in the territory: the Mayan tribes that dominated the eastern part of the territory (lencas) and the Pipil tribes that originally belonged to the Aztec kingdom but had come from the north (Mexico and Guatemala) and populated the Western parts of the territory.

(4) Vocabulary, gyration, grammatical or semantic phonetic feature that belongs to or derives from an indigenous language of the Americas]¹⁴⁷.

These four levels – (1) Study, (2) Doctrine, (3) Exaltation and (4) Language – represent the different ways in which *indigenismo* is expressed. In tribal metal, all four of these levels are constantly present. Those artists who dedicate themselves to the different genres and sub-genres of tribal metal intensely *study* the local indigenous tribes (as many times they belong to them or recognize their belonging to them by blood) and then turn these studies into a *doctrine* with which they confront Western realities in their own countries. This doctrine often takes a political turn in the form of social protest against the local government's treatment of the remaining indigenous communities or, oftentimes, simply against the ideologies of these governments and its citizens that view the indigenous and their ideologies as 'something of the past'. As a result, the bands *exalt* the indigenous themes in their music through: album artwork, an incorporation of indigenous instruments, dressing in indigenous garb, a staunch defense of indigenous ideologies in their lyrics, inclusion of indigenous rituals on stage and a use of indigenous *languages* in their music (which in and of itself requires study and dedication).

As an alternate ideology, *indigenismo* forms part of what academics call the 'subaltern'¹⁴⁸. It is then both *alternate* to the established and solidified ideologies of the West in the region and *subjugate* to it. While the use of the prefix 'sub' implies a sense of inferiority, it should not be taken as a such. *Indigenismo* is not itself an

¹⁴⁷ "Indigenismo", *Real Academia Española*.

¹⁴⁸ "Subaltern" is defined by *Oxford Reference* as, "A term conceived by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who because he was in prison and his writings subject to censorship used it as a codeword for any class of people (but especially peasants and workers) subject to the hegemony of another more powerful class. The term has been adopted by a group of Postcolonial Studies scholars, thus forming a sub-discipline within the field known as Subaltern Studies".

‘inferior’ ideology or phenomenon in that it is not, inherently, in-and-of itself, inferior in strength to the Western form of thought. However, the use of ‘sub’ recognizes the fact that *indigenismo* is seen as inferior *to the proponents of Western thought*. On the contrary, the propagators of indigenous thought and the indigenous themselves do not view their ideologies as ‘inferior’ in scope to the European (even though many have accepted a sense of ‘self-colonization’ that recognizes the dominance of the latter). Regardless of the case, the phenomenon is seen as a perfectly viable alternative to the contemporary worldview, even if it is subjugated to it.

The use of *indigenismo*, then, is much more than a form of artistic expression or aesthetic. Instead, it is an exploration of those ideologies that were subjugated to the ideologies of the Western world after the conquest (for instance, pantheism vs. monotheism). Tied to the idea of ‘indigenous’ is a sense of identity within the local community. “They” are important because “they” are a part of the history of the country and a part of the personal history of its citizens. Many Salvadorans recognize that they cannot distance themselves completely from the indigenous as they are all (in a general sense) related to this past by blood. Therefore, *indigenismo* is not a phenomenon that is tied solely to literature or other forms of artistic production but is more a part of the national identity of the Salvadoran as a whole. Even those with claims of ‘purely’ European blood recognize the importance of the indigenous to both the history of the country and to the identity of its citizenry. To understand how *indigenismo* became an engrained part of the Salvadoran identity, however, one must first understand *what* that identity *is* (or at least how it is expressed) and *how* it came to be.

Salvadoran National Identity

For Latin American countries like Argentina, the formation of a national identity began shortly after Independence from Spain. Intellectuals like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento began debating the qualities specific to the Argentine as early as 1845 with his work *Facundo o civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas*. Sarmiento's focus on the character and characteristics of the *gaucho*, a figure central to Argentine identity, would later be debated by writers like José Hernández with his novel *Martín Fierro* and would eventually come to define what an Argentine, in essence, 'is' (either in their identification with the figure or their distancing from it). Far from problematic, the characteristics expressed as desirable, or not desirable, came to differentiate the Argentine from the Bolivian, the Brazilian from the Salvadoran, etc. and would later become solidified in the twentieth century through the formation of the modern nation-state and the mass urbanization of Argentine cities.

A similar process occurred in the other republics throughout Latin America. Through the process of independence, the intellectualization of characteristics specific to a local geo-political space, the formation of the nation-state and later mass urbanization, each individual country came to define 'what it means to be us'. For El Salvador, the process was very similar. As one Salvadoran writer explains, "Salvadoreño significa, en todo momento, hispanoamericano, aceptando en su integridad la expresiva limitación de la palabra" [Salvadoran means, in every instance, Spanish American, accepting in its integrity the expressive limitation of the word]¹⁴⁹. However, in opposition to the histories of other Latin American countries like Argentina, for El Salvador – due to the lack of the large waves of immigration in

¹⁴⁹ Barón Castro, 486.

the nineteenth century typical to Latin America¹⁵⁰ and the lack of a ‘national figure’ like the *gaucho* – it is slightly harder to pinpoint the moment that the idea of a Salvadoran identity began to formalize. Nonetheless, as early as 1942, before the mass urbanization of El Salvador, we can see the beginnings of a definition of the characteristics inherent to ‘Salvadorans’ in works like *La población de El Salvador* by Rodolfo Barón Castro.

In this work, Barón Castro investigates the formation of the population of El Salvador from pre-Colombian times until the time of his own writing in 1942. But what is most interesting is the conclusions that he draws based upon the history which he is writing. Barón Castro demonstrates vividly and in minute detail the changes in population and the characteristics inherent to the people who lived and are living in El Salvador. When writing about post-Independence El Salvador, he concludes: 1) that the Salvadoran population did not experience the same amount of immigration from Europe as countries such as Argentina¹⁵¹; 2) that the idea of proper governance was related directly to the populating of a country under the motto “Gobernar es popular” [To govern is to populate]¹⁵²; 3) that the Salvadoran population enjoys a certain homogenization as it comes to diversity of races in that the country is made up mostly of *mestizos*, *indios* [Indigenous] and *blancos* [White Men], of which the *mestizos* make up the largest portion of the population¹⁵³; 4) that the frequent destruction of the capital by seismic activity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century

¹⁵⁰ Rodolfo Barón Castro demonstrates this fact in detail: “Dos causas principales [que no hubo mayor flujo de inmigrantes Europeos en el siglo XIX eran:]... una, la elevada densidad del país, que hacía de hecho innecesaria la mano de obra extranjera; la otra, el alejamiento de las ruta oceánicas más frecuentadas.” [Two principle causes (of why there was not a larger flow of European immigrants in the 19th Century were:)... One, the elevated density of the country, which truly made a foreign workforce unnecessary; the other, the distance from the more frequented oceanic routes]. (382)

¹⁵¹ Barón Castro, 378-381.

¹⁵² Barón Castro, 377, 387.

¹⁵³ Barón Castro, 460-463.

demonstrates the strength and resilience of the Salvadoran people¹⁵⁴; and 6) that the consistently fast growth of the Salvadoran population was due to high-birth rates¹⁵⁵, low mortality rates¹⁵⁶, the “efficiency of the *mestizaje* [miscegenation]”¹⁵⁷, and an “extraordinary vital strength.”¹⁵⁸ All of these characteristics inherent to what Barón Castro quantifies as a multiplication of population by 12.2 since 1778¹⁵⁹ leads him to the following conclusion as it regards the population of El Salvador:

Ved, si no, un pueblo numeroso, trabajador y arriscado, que se desenvuelve y progresa en un estrecho territorial que labra sus tierras con habilidosa maestría; que planta ciudades donde las fuerzas telúricas las destruyen; que llena su suelo de industrias grandes y pequeñas, de caminos, de vehículos... Si por un instante pudierais asomaros a sus campos y ciudades veríais en los apartados caseríos, con dominguero atuendo, entre los florones de los cañaverales y el nodular de las palmeras, gentes de rostro cetrino que se encaminan a la iglesia atraídas por el sonido alegre del esquilón aldeano; veríais en la paz de los burgos modestos, en día de labor, otras semejantes que transitan, comercian o se afanan en el duro bregar de la vida cotidiana; veríais en las capitales, entre el bullicio de los vehículos, de los motores y de las fábricas, a otras parecidas que luchan con denuedo, se agitan en los negocios, en un incesante ir y venir, trocar, vender, transformar.... Veríais unas gentes a las que fácilmente habríais de considerar unidas por un doble vínculo de sangre y de espíritu, reflejado el primero en la color de su piel y el segundo en su habla, en su cultura y en su religión. Veríais lo español, lo indígena y lo mestizo, que no es otra cosa lo salvadoreño. No hay, pues, en este pueblo fisura alguna por donde pueda escapar, con razón, voz discordante.

[See, if otherwise, a numerous people, hard-working and resolute, that unravels and progresses in a narrow territory; that labors its lands with skillful mastery; that plants cities where the telluric forces destroy them; that fills its soil with large and small industries, with roads, with vehicles... If for a moment you could approach its fields and cities, you would see in the remote villages, with Sunday best attire, between the large flowers of the reed beds and the ripple of the palm trees, people with olive faces that head for church attracted by the joyful sound of the village bell; you would see in the peace of the modest hamlets, during the labor of the day, other neighbors who travel, trade or endeavor in the hard struggle of everyday life; you would see in the capitals, between the noise of the vehicles, of the motors and of the factories, other similar

¹⁵⁴ Barón Castro, 436-438.

¹⁵⁵ Barón Castro, 466-467.

¹⁵⁶ Barón Castro, 471.

¹⁵⁷ Barón Castro, 476.

¹⁵⁸ Barón Castro, 476.

¹⁵⁹ Barón Castro, 477.

people who fight with valor, who flutter about in their businesses, in an incessant come and go, exchange, sell, transform.... You would see a people whom you would have to consider united by a double bond of blood and spirit, the first reflected in the color of their skin and the second in their speech, in their culture and in their religion. You would see the essence of the Spanish, the indigenous and the mestizo, which is nothing more than the essence of the Salvadoran. There is not, then, in the town any rupture from which to escape, with reason, a dissenting voice.]¹⁶⁰

La población de El Salvador would come to form one of the most important works on the population of El Salvador in the history of the country, as is apparent by the fact that it is still in use today on a national level. Even though it is interesting that Barón Castro's conclusions about the Salvadoran being hard-working, resilient, industrious, religious, and bound-together under the ties of *mestizaje* would pass into the national literature and popular culture of the country in the later parts of the twentieth century, there are many oversights in his work as to the recent events in his country (although not, admittedly, through any fault or ideological stance of his own¹⁶¹) that would later cast light onto the limitations of his definitions of a Salvadoran identity.

The most emblematic event that was overlooked by Barón Castro, and of which he may well have not been aware, is the massacre of indigenous and rural workers that occurred in 1932. If one were to believe all of the conclusions made by

¹⁶⁰ Barón Castro, 486-487.

¹⁶¹ When making such a critique of Barón Castro's work, it is important to keep in mind that the author is a Salvadoran who left El Salvador for Spain in 1928. He writes in Madrid in the middle of the Spanish Civil War where communication to and from El Salvador was very limited. Therefore, it is a possibility that he was not aware of the events of 1932, at least not in complete detail. However, based upon his introduction to the second edition of 1978, where most of the writing is spent describing the praise that the work had received worldwide, Barón Castro still fails to bring up such an important topic. It is not the goal of this paper to imply whether or not the author was aware and willfully overlooked the repression of 1932, but, at the least, to make the reader aware of the shortcomings present in his work.

this work on face-value alone, one would believe that the indigenous lived in perfect harmony with the *mestizo* majority of the population, in some type of tropical utopia. However, the fact that, as we have seen, an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 indigenous and rural workers were massacred, while this book itself was being written and prepared for publishing, demonstrates that Barón Castro's ultimate conclusion of the impossibility of a 'dissenting voice' within the country is far from the reality of the country, then *and* now.

From the time that *La población de El Salvador* was written until today, the population of El Salvador has more than tripled¹⁶². This mass population increase, together with the industrialization of the country and the resulting mass urbanization in the late twentieth century, has helped to solidify the characteristics of a national identity as proposed by Barón Castro and countless other Salvadoran writers and intellectuals. It is important, then, to first look at what the term 'Salvadoran' has come to mean as a national identity in its contemporary context. The term itself simply refers to the native-born people within the borders of El Salvador. However, it has come to mean many different things since Barón Castro in 1942.

Most importantly the term 'Salvadoran' (and the common popular, yet incorrect, derivatives Salvadorian or Salvadorean¹⁶³) encompasses a culture's look back upon itself. When asking the common Salvadoran what it means to be just that, many will refer to the fact that they are hard workers, often ignored by other countries and practically invisible on an international scale. The director of local radio station

¹⁶² Barón Castro's last official count in 1940 shows a population of 1,787,930. The current population of El Salvador is estimated at 6.34 million. This indicates a population increase of 3.54 since 1940.

¹⁶³ Both of these derivatives are a mixture of the Spanish term *salvadoreño* and the proper English term *Salvadoran*. However, the latter is the only correct term in English while the other two have been propagated by misinformation and mass use.

94.9 Radio Astral¹⁶⁴, Manuel Martínez, said that Salvadorans are pointed out all the time in international media, as in the most recent case of the driver of Paul Walker's car that crashed causing both of their deaths and the *náufrago* (castaway) who stirred up international attention with his claims of being lost at sea for 13 months. In fact, this aspect of the term 'Salvadoran' prompted Manuel to send me a copy of a local political cartoon made by the cartoonist, Alecus¹⁶⁵:



Figure 5

[Castaway:
 “You survived a lot of time without food, without direction, without hope and yet you are still cheerful.
 Tell us: How did you do it?
 It’s because I’m Salvadoran.]

This cartoon illustrates the idea that a ‘Salvadoran’ is a hard-working person who is able to endure many, many hardships. And this is even true about many metal bands in El Salvador. Most have to fight to make a living on top of being a musician. As Manuel and many different musicians and fans in El Salvador say, “nadie vive de

¹⁶⁴ Radio Astral has since been moved online (Sept. 2014) and was replaced by a Reggaetón station on the air. This is yet another indication of the struggle to keep the heavy metal scene alive in El Salvador.

¹⁶⁵ Translation from left to right of the cartoon.

la música metal en El Salvador” [nobody makes a living off of metal music in El Salvador]. The sad reality is that there truly is no industry. Selling CDs and merchandise must be done on a person-to-person basis, as finding stores and even sidewalk-shops that will sell your product is virtually impossible. For example, it took over two hours just to find a stand in San Salvador that sells heavy metal CDs and only two to three of the CDs offered were national bands. This is after searching every box in the store inventory. Therefore, it is easy to see that the Salvadoran metal bands fit the characteristics that are believed to encapsulate the identity of the Salvadoran people.

Another identity that many people associate with El Salvador and its populace is that of the gang member, or *pandillero*. The gangs identify themselves through the use of common iconography and tattoos. The tattoos, for the most part, tell stories of the *pandilleros* crimes and identify to which gang they belong. For the MS-13, the number 13 is a common tattoo as well is the hand signal of the ‘devil horns’. Like the metalheads devil horns used at concerts, the gang members use the horns to supposedly relate themselves to the devil and his cult. The main difference between the two is simply the extension of the fingers (the gangs spread their fingers wide apart while the metalhead holds them straight up). For this reason, it is difficult for many metalheads to use the devil horns in public and to not be associated with the gangs by accident (especially by those from outside the community who have no understanding of it). This identity recognizes that the gang members dress in a certain fashion (for the most part) and are fans of music like reggaetón and hip-hop, which helps to distance them from other local social groups like metalheads. Nonetheless, the Salvadoran version of the ‘cholo’, or gangster, is a pervading identity that is recognized worldwide (especially

after documentaries, like “MS13: World’s Most Dangerous Gang” on Netflix, that spread the image of the *marero* internationally).

While the identity of the *pandillero* with all of its characteristics is an established identity, it is an extreme one – even if we recognize its popularity. As I have mentioned before though, there are many identities and assigned characteristics that are believed to describe Salvadorans on a mass scale (apart from just the extremes) that are not truly accepted by many Salvadorans themselves. In fact, throughout the history of El Salvador and even before the existence of the street gangs, Salvadoran writers and intellectuals have questioned these identities, sometimes playing with them in a tongue-in-cheek fashion and sometimes outright refuting them. Even the very history of literature itself in El Salvador is an inspiration for many contemporary artists who attempt to invoke and critique these national identities and their resulting culture. The National Poet of El Salvador, Roque Dalton, is well-known for making the argument that poetry (and by extension music) *is* an adequate means of dissent against government, culture and everyday life. In the introduction to *Poemas Clandestinos/Clandestine Poems*, Margaret Randall illustrates this point beautifully by saying,

Many of us [Mexican poets] still thought that ‘politics was outside the realm of art.’ Roque made us see that wasn’t so. He taught us, among many other things, that a simplistic sense of ‘socialist realism’, in terms of creative expression, was nothing more nor less than a lack of respect for the work we were doing. That art was life, and that political commitment... was simply that: a commitment to life. That art, to be revolutionary in the first place, had to be good.¹⁶⁶

In a similar fashion, a musical genre that aligns itself to both the history of El Salvador and the identity of ‘being Salvadoran’ takes up the ‘fight’ of Roque Dalton

¹⁶⁶ Dalton, *Clandestine Poems/Poemas Clandestinos*, IV.

in their lyrics. The first, and most obvious, example of this transference would be by the group *Bohemia*, an early metal band in El Salvador arriving on the scene in 1996. Their song, 'Poema de Amor' [Love Poem], uses the poem of the same title by Roque Dalton as lyrics. The most interesting part of this choice is that this particular poem itself is a questioning of Salvadoran identity. The poem is as follows:

Los que ampliaron el Canal de Panamá
 (y fueron clasificados como silver roll y
 no como gold roll),
 los que repararon la flota del Pacífico en
 las bases de California,
 los que se pudrieron en la cárceles de
 Guatemala, México, Honduras,
 Nicaragua, por ladrones, por
 contrabandistas, por estafadores, por
 hambrientos,
 los siempre sospechosos de todo
 ("me permito remitirle al interfecto por
 esquinero sospechoso y con el agravante
 de ser salvadoreño"),
 las que llenaron los bares y los burdeles
 de todos los puertos y las capitales de la
 zona ("La gruta azul," "El Calzoncito,"
 "Happyland"),
 los reyes de la página roja, los que
 nunca saben de donde son,
 los mejores artesanos del mundo,
 los que fueron cosidos a balazos al
 cruzar la frontera,
 los que murieron de paludismo o de las
 picadas del escorpión o de la barba
 amarilla en el infierno de las bananeras,

 los que lloraron borrachos por el himno
 nacional bajo el ciclón del Pacífico o la
 nieve del norte,
 los arrimados, los
 mendigos, los marihuaneros, los
 guanacos hijos de la gran puta, los que
 apenas pudieron regresar, los que
 tuvieron un poco más de suerte,
 los eternos indocumentados,
 los hacelotodo,
 los vendelotodo,
 los comelotodo,

[Those who expanded the Panama Canal
 (and they were classified as silver roll
 and not as gold roll),
 those who repaired the Pacific fleet in
 the bases of California,
 those who rotted in prisons in
 Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras,
 Nicaragua, as thieves, as
 smugglers, as swindlers, as
 hungry,
 the always suspicious of everything
 ("I allow myself to refer to the interfeerer
 as a suspected cornerback and with the
 aggravation of being a Salvadoran"),
 those that filled the bars and the brothels
 of all the ports and capitals of the area
 ("The Blue Grotto," "The Short,"
 "Happyland"),
 the kings of the red page, those who
 never know where they are from,
 the best craftsmen in the world,
 those who were riddled with bullets
 when crossing the border,
 those who died of malaria or of the
 stings of the scorpion or of the yellow
 beard in the hell of the banana
 plantations,
 those who cried drunk for the national
 anthem under the Pacific cyclone or the
 northern snow,
 the unwelcome houseguests, the
 beggars, the potheads, the *guanacos*,
 children of the great whore, those who
 were barely able to return, those who
 had a little more luck,
 the eternal undocumented,
 the do-it-all,
 the sell-it-all,
 the eat-it-all,

los primeros en sacar el cuchillo,	the first to take out the knife,
los tristes más tristes del mundo,	the saddest of the sad in the world,
mis compatriotas , mis hermanos...	my compatriots, my brothers ...] ¹⁶⁷

The poem, in a general sense, is a list of qualities that Salvadorans share. At the end of the poem, Roque finishes by calling them all “mis compatriotas, / mis hermanos” [my compatriots / my brothers]. But the language used in the identification of Salvadorans by exploring specific traits lays rest to any doubt as to why the poem is a perfect fit for a metal song. Roque Dalton refers to Salvadorans as, “los que lloran borrachos por el himno nacional” [those drunks who cry for the national anthem], “los arrimados, los mendigos, los marihuaneros” [the houseguests, the beggars, the potheads], “los guanacos¹⁶⁸ hijos de la gran puta” [the Salvadorans sons of the great bitch], “los eternos indocumentados” [the eternally undocumented] and “los tristes más tristes del mundo” [the saddest of the sad in the world]. It is obvious that Roque Dalton is using a bittersweet irony to display not only the perception that ‘outsiders’ (i.e., the international community) have about what a Salvadoran is, but also how a Salvadoran views him or herself - both sad and proud at the same time. It is this shared duality that is still present in Salvadoran music, culture and even anti-culture today.

Another technique used by Dalton to question both the church and the government as authority figures is the re-wording of well-known church verses to unmask what he understands to be hypocrisy in both communities (which is no

¹⁶⁷ “Poema de Amor” by Roque Dalton, from *Antología*, 296-297.

¹⁶⁸ *Guanaco* is a Salvadoran slang term that refers to the identity of Salvadorans. A *guanaco* is actually a relative of the llama family from South America, but when used to refer to a person, the term means ‘dull’ or ‘bull-headed’. As it has been explained to me, the term was used by the Spanish to refer to the native and mestizo populations who they needed to ‘poke’ or ‘prod’ to get to work, much like a *guanaco* must be ‘poked’ and ‘prodded’. The term is a negative term but has been adopted by a majority of Salvadorans and is now simply another term meaning Salvadoran.

surprise coming from such a staunch socialist). In his poem *Variaciones Sobre una Frase de Cristo*³⁰, Dalton uses the popular Bible verse, Mark 12:17, as a means to interrogate both the Salvadoran government and the Salvadoran Catholic church.

I	[I
Dad a Dios lo que es de	Give unto God what is of God
Dios	
y al César lo que es del	and to Caesar what is of Caesar. "
César.”	
Dad a Dios lo que es de	Give unto God what is of God
Dios	
y al gobierno fascista del Presidente	and to the fascist government of
Molina	President Molina
lo que es del gobierno fascista del	what is the fascist government of
Presidente Molina.	President Molina.
Yo no pretendo saber desde mi	I do not pretend to know from my
pequeñez	littleness
todo lo que es de	everything that is of God
Dios.	
Pero sí estoy seguro de lo que debemos	But I am sure of what we should give
dar	to the fascist government of President
al gobierno fascista del Presidente	Molina.
Molina.	
II	II
Dad a Dios lo que es de	Give unto God what is of God
Dios	
y al gobierno de los	And to the government of the rich
ricos	
lo que es del gobierno de los	what is of the government of the rich.
ricos.	
Pero,	But,
¿qué más vamos a darle al gobierno de	What else are we going to give to the
los ricos	government of the rich
si con ayuda de su gobierno los ricos ya	if with the help of your government the
acabaron	rich have already finished
de quitárnoslo todo?	taking everything from us?] ¹⁶⁹

The verse in its original is, “Dad a Dios lo que es de Dios / y al César lo que es de César. [Give unto God what is of God / and to Cesar what is of Cesar]”. But Dalton rewrites it in two different phrasings: the first, “I”, invokes the “gobierno fascista de

¹⁶⁹ Dalton, *Clandestine Poems/Poemas Clandestinos*, 52-53.

Molina” [the fascist government of Molina] as an equivalent to the Caesar of Roman times; the second, “II”, invokes the “gobierno de los ricos” [the government of the rich] pointing to the obvious fact that Molina’s government and, by extension, the Salvadoran government itself (under any leader) are all run by the rich oligarchy – a criticism that can be found in almost any Salvadoran literature from the time of the *latifundios* to *hoy en día* [present day]. The fact that this criticism is in the words of the Bible is an obvious critique of the church’s lack of confrontation with the government about the situation.

Following in Dalton’s footsteps, the Salvadoran band *La Iguana* (whose fans refer to themselves as ‘*La Mara Iguana*’ [The Iguana Gang], a play on words referring to marijuana) used the same technique to criticize the Salvadoran government for ‘selling’ the country to the United States – a common criticism of North American Imperialism in Central America. In this case, the song, ‘Yes Patrón’, takes the words of the *Padre Nuestro* (Our Father) prayer and rewords it directing itself towards the United States as the *Patrón* or ‘owner’ of the Salvadoran government. The rewording states:

Patrón nuestro que estás en el norte,	[Our patron who is in the North,
capitalizado sea tu nombre...	Capitalized by your name...
depórtanos de tu reino.	Deport us from your kingdom.
Sea hecha tu voluntad en El Salvador	Your Will be done in El Salvador,
Como en Latinoamérica.	As it is in Latin America.
El pan nuestro de cada día impórtanoslo	Import to us our daily bread
y explórtanos así como nosotros a	And exploit us as we exploit our
nuestros trabajadores	workers
No nos dejes caer en revolución	Do not let us fall into revolution
Más libranos de Marx,	Better yet free us from Marx
Porque tuyo es el reino, el poder... por	Because yours is the kingdom, the
los siglos de los siglos. OK.	power... for the ages and the ages.
	OK.] ¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ “Yes Patrón” lyrics from El Faro article, “Historias del Rock” by Oscar Leiva Marinero.

This rendition of *Nuestro Padre* confronts the capitalization suffered under imperialism by the entirety of Latin America, from the perspective of El Salvador. It references deportations, importation of goods, exploitation of workers and the view of many conservatives (especially those in the oligarchy and ruling party of the time) that El Salvador is ‘underdeveloped’ and needs the United States to ‘develop’ it. Of course, this last critique is written with the sarcastic cry-for-help to save Salvadorans from both revolution and Marx. The song ends with a quick jab at the encroachment of the English language into Salvadoran culture by using the term ‘OK’ in place of the term ‘Amén’. This technique used by both Roque Dalton and by *La Iguana* may be common to many different types of literature, but the important part here is that it is utilized by both literature and heavy metal as a critique of purely national issues. These same issues help to construct and to (de)construct the national identity of ‘Salvadoran’.

For the heavy metal community, the idea that El Salvador only makes tropical music and that metalheads are somehow misidentified as local gang members is one of the most problematic characteristics assigned to it by the ideas of national identity. While we have seen that it is true that metalheads and gang members share a common iconography through the use of skulls and death-related imagery and tattoos, the fact is that the two could not be farther apart. Most metalheads in El Salvador see their music as a way to escape their anger – as an act of catharsis. Or as the group *Pantera* would say, “The releasing of anger can better any medicine under the sun”¹⁷¹. These musicians speak out against the gang-related violence in their country and call their

¹⁷¹ Mouth for War lyrics, *AZLyrics*..

government to task for the socio-political problems that have allowed the problem to grow.

This ‘calling-to-task’ is what many people call the ‘irreverent tone’ of heavy metal music. It is loud and ‘in-your-face’ but it is also posing questions. In a lot of instances these questions are of a socio-political nature. This can be seen in many heavy metal bands that have emerged from Latin America or from the North American bands that address Latin American issues. The two prime examples are Sepultura from Brazil and Rage Against the Machine from the United States. Both bands’ lyrical content protests what happens ‘in the streets’ of Latin America - the poverty and desperation that many citizens have to go through and their undying urge to fight back. It is this ‘fight back’, or resistance, against society and against government (and even against religion) that has come to be known as ‘irreverence’.

Rage Against the Machine became famous with songs such as “Sleep Now in the Fire” and “Bulls on Parade”, which talk about the conquest of the Americas and the crimes of dictators in Latin America, respectively. This very direct form of irreverent protest, as exemplified by the use of Ché Guevara as iconography for the group¹⁷², is very common both in Latin American society and in heavy metal music. However, the more common ‘irreverence’ would be that employed by Sepultura – what some people have to come to call ‘subversive’ lyrical production. The main message of songs like ‘Refuse/Resist’ by Sepultura is that human beings are not meant to live in poverty and the only way to escape this desolate state is to refuse to cooperate and to resist authority. To *be* irreverent not just in song but in ‘deed’. Many

¹⁷² In fact, *Rage Against the Machine* assisted in making the image of Ché Guevara popular in the United States as a t-shirt design in the 1990s worn by the lead singer, Zack de la Rocha. The obvious contradiction here is that Ché Guevara, a socialist icon, was turned into a capitalist commodity by the very people who were protesting the North American capitalist system through their music.

Salvadoran bands have followed in suit and have come to be identified by this form of irreverence.

As has been illustrated, being ‘Salvadoran’ can mean many things, but it is important to note that many ‘metalheads’ in El Salvador see themselves as ‘Salvadoran Metalheads’. While many Salvadorans do not self-identify as metalheads, almost every metalhead in El Salvador identifies themselves as Salvadoran. They wear this badge proudly during events like El Salvador Metalfest and Independence Metalfest. It is at these events that one can see the overall support of the heavy metal scene, not just because of the genre, or love of the music, but because it is ‘Salvadoran’. This can also be seen in the camaraderie of the local metal community involving local graphic artists, radio and television programs, concert organizers and university students who all help keep the music alive although almost all of them must do so in their spare time – after the work day ends.

In the promotion of Metalfest, we can also see the similar use of iconography that is used in North American metal. The graphic design work used to promote concerts follows the same skewed look at local culture as can be seen at Maryland Deathfest 2014 in the United States. In the promotional material for Maryland Deathfest, there is a utilization of local iconography with Edgar Allen Poe (a Baltimore favorite – Baltimore being the location of the Deathfest) in front of the Maryland flag holding onto a bloody tombstone – a metal ‘twist’ on the well-known, popularized version of the author (Figure 6). The same has been done with the promotional material for El Salvador Metalfest 2014 where the popularized ‘symbol’ or ‘icon’ of El Salvador, the *Estatua del Salvador del Mundo* [Statue of the Savior of the World] is re-envisioned and ‘twisted’ (Figure 7). In the design, Jesus has come down from the top of the statue, looking almost ‘zombified’, carrying a pair of

drumsticks and extending them out towards the viewer as an understood ‘invitation to rock’. In both examples, one from the USA and the other from El Salvador, there is a ‘twist’ or ‘new look’ at what it is to be a Marylander and what it is to be Salvadoran. While there is no apparent plagiarism of ideas, to a well-versed metalhead it is not shocking that such a repetition of ideas could happen so far apart from each other. This is because of the shared philosophy of life that most metalheads experience in the metal music scene. Therefore, it is no surprise that there are metal bands in El Salvador, like Virginia Clemm (a title derived from the name of Edgar Allen Poe’s wife), that make references to literature, both national and international, even in the naming of their band.



Figure 6



Figure 7

The contemporary ideas of being ‘Salvadoran’, then, are rooted in established local identities – as national identities tend to be throughout the world. However, the space created between the conclusions drawn by early writers in the nation building process and the reality lived by the populace today remains intact. It must be made clear here, though, that this is not to say that there is a unified idea as to what the identity of the Salvadoran *is*. In fact, large sections of the population, for one reason or another, might disagree with many of these characteristics while simultaneously identifying with others. For example, someone living in the municipalities outside of the urbanized centers might feel a close identification with someone like Barón Castro’s definitions but someone from within the urban centers might feel completely distanced from the same. This is not to say that these distinctions are based on geography alone, as social class also has much to do with which aspects of being ‘Salvadoran’ many citizens choose to agree or disagree.

In fact, at the bottom of the issue here, is the questioning of where another important part of the population and its identity, the indigenous, *belongs* in contemporary Salvadoran society. For thinkers like Barón Castro, the indigenous is only valid through a program of *mestizaje* where indigenous traits are mixed with European traits through the ‘cross-breeding’ of citizens. That is to say that the pure indigenous is *not* properly valued as an identity in-and-of itself, but only through its relation to the expansion of European blood in the region. Given the fact that the indigenous suffered a brutal conquest and colonization by the Spanish, constant marginalization and genocide at the hands of the Republican/Democratic Nation State and continued socio-political marginalization by the society as a whole (where traits of indigenous ancestry are often looked down upon instead of revered) all contribute to the desire, by many, to bring the indigenous to the forefront and to provide them a new space in contemporary society where their contribution to the history of the country can properly be valued.

Nonetheless, due to this program of *mestizaje*, there are resulting characteristics that Salvadorans of all social classes recognize as being ‘Salvadoran’, of which exaggerations and stereotypes pervade. For many, Barón Castro’s idea that the ‘real’ Salvadoran is a mixture of both indigenous and European blood pervades. It is within this space of contradictions, though, between literary hyperbole and everyday reality that those who disagree with such popularized, utopian images of the Salvadoran identity base their discourses. Amongst these dissenters are heavy metal musicians that use their music, artwork, lyrics and general aesthetic to voice said dissent against these widely accepted identities. It is important to understand, though, that at the bottom of this dissent is a questioning of *how* these identities came to be, *who* wrote them and *what they mean* in a contemporary setting. It comes from a place

of intellectual pursuit, non-conformity with the status quo and sense of rebellion against those ‘tags’ or characteristics that one feels imposed upon them but with which they do not personally relate.

Positivism, Modernity and Indigenous Thought

At work, underneath of Barón Castro’s thought and even within the definition of a Salvadoran identity, are ideologies and epistemologies that have been established and strengthened by Western thought in the nation building process. One of the most influential of these ideologies on Central America, and by extension on Barón Castro, is that of *positivismo* [Positivism]. The philosophy of positivism had a large impact on Latin America during the nation building process. The motto of “Order and Progress” was so substantially spread throughout the region that it is even written on the national flag of Brazil – *Ordem e Progreso*. Nonetheless, today with ideas like ‘legal positivism’ or ‘scientific positivism’, the definition of the term has become quite muddled. As Treavor Pearce explains it, within the positivist rhetoric, “the job of philosophy is to organize or unify the sciences, though they disagreed about the nature of this unification. As Fiske puts it, ‘positive philosophy is science organized’.”¹⁷³

In essence, positivism, at least in Latin America, was focused on the unification of the sciences (even with philosophy) into a system of both order and progress. This “order” was meant as a means to organize the socio-political classes, the different realms of academic inquiry (science with metaphysics) and even the newly forming republics in the region. The question, then, for most would be: Progress towards what? For many positivists, the answer would lie in the European philosopher who had established positivism and exported it to Latin America. In other words, progress in Latin America was progress *towards* European ideas of society,

¹⁷³ Pearce, 442.

government and ideals. With this in mind, it is no surprise that writers like Barón Castro would emphasize the organization of Salvadoran society into social classes and that *mestizaje*, in other words a ‘whitening’ of the remaining indigenous population, would be of utmost importance. Today, apart from the still existent difference in social classes based upon proximity to North American and European culture, the idea of progress towards becoming a ‘developed nation’ – in other words, towards a European and North American ideal – still remains a large discourse in local political debate.

For the indigenous, positivism meant the loss of natural resources to the government, but also a colonization of their ideologies, philosophies and culture in order for the non-indigenous Salvadoran to appear more European. In other words, many Salvadorans would shy away from the Maya-Pipil past in an attempt to approximate the European culture. It is no surprise, then, that works like Barón Castro’s, leave the indigenous such a small part in the history of the formation of the Salvadoran nation and Salvadoran identity. For many, the indigenous was and is an historical past that should be left in the past. The idea of progress is towards an industrialized age of technology placed somewhere in the near future while the indigenous, and their philosophies, are seen as a ‘return’ to the previous stone age.

This form of thought, of course, is based upon the European epistemology of time as a linear phenomenon. For the modern, Western philosophy, time is linear in the sense that it began at one point and continues forward. This is apparent in the calendar that is based upon dates that continue to progress forward (2007, 2008, 2009, etc.) and also in the use of year zero (the year of Christ) as a starting part for the modern age. Given this understanding, it is easy to see both that the indigenous idea of time as circular would be discarded by the Europeans (as with the rest of their

thought) *and* that the indigenous philosophies of closeness to mother nature, polytheism, holistic medicine and a rejection of modern technology would contribute further to their marginalization in the region. For many thinkers and politicians (as we have seen with General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez), the indigenous were seen as a quaint remnant of the past that, as long as they were kept in control by the government and landowners, served as a unique part of Salvadoran history and identity but not necessarily a crucial part of such.

This program of *mestizaje* and *positivism* is only one of the many ways in which Western thought was imposed upon the region by one ruling class after another, starting with the conquest of the Spaniards. This process, known as colonization, solidified Modernity in the region as a European import that ingrained itself into the structure of the country and its people. Those that disagree with this Modernity must then not only fight the colonization of thought but also the modern state system, known as a republic, into which El Salvador was formed. It goes without saying that the indigenous had little (even more realistically *no*) input on the formation of the country that was built around them and on top of their land. For many in the country who recognize with the indigenous and fight against this imposition and the resulting injustices (like 1932), the only real answer is a ‘decolonization’ of modern thought specific to El Salvador itself.

This ‘decolonization’ is meant, in the end, to free the society from the contradictions that Modernity, together with positivism, has imposed upon it. As I have previously shown, Heidegger explains the process of Modernity within five distinct phenomena: 1) science, 2) modern technology, 3) art as subjective aesthetics, 4) culture and 5) the loss of the gods. All of these phenomena contribute to the

‘frame’ with which we view the world or, what Heidegger calls, the “world picture’.

He explains that,

Where the world becomes picture, what is, in its entirety, is juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself. Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth. Wherever we have the world picture, an essential decision takes place regarding what is, in its entirety. The Being of whatever is, is sought and found in the representedness of the latter.¹⁷⁴

The ‘world as picture’ then is the manner in which we ‘see’ the world as represented in our reality. The idea of the world picture makes it clear how different ‘worldviews’ can exist simultaneously – even though one (Western Modernity) subjugates the others to it. Heidegger explains further that, “the world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age”.¹⁷⁵ In this modern age, reality (and being as a result) are directly connected to the way in which reality is represented as picture by man. This world picture, or *Weltbild*, is often described as a “conception of the world” or a “philosophy of life”.¹⁷⁶ However, in another sense, it is constitutive of our own “understood reality” (as Jason Stanley calls it) within which rational debate and discourse allows us to establish socio-political norms (and even laws) and, ultimately, also of how we understand ourselves and our ‘place in the picture’ (world). It is this ‘picture’ that fascists and conspiracy theorists attempt to

¹⁷⁴ Heidegger, 129 – 130.

¹⁷⁵ Heidegger, 130.

¹⁷⁶ Heidegger, 128.

‘replace’ with their own realities and hierarchies in an attempt to dominate the “they” that are seen as enemies of the “us”.

For others, however, the ‘picture’ must be deconstructed and reality questioned in order to ‘decolonize’ the mind (and society) from what is seen as the pitfalls of the modern world picture. It is from within this discourse, then, that decolonization attempts to deconstruct these ideas and offer alternative ideologies often based upon local histories and realities. For this to happen, at least in El Salvador, a return to ‘folkdom’ is essential. In a return to indigenous thought, Salvadorans can, theoretically, see the picture of how the world was *before* the arrival of Modernity, pin-point its differences with local history/thought, incorporate this into the modern world picture and thus battle against the ways in which it defines and controls contemporary socio-political thought.

Indigenous thought, then, is a counter-point to modern ‘reality’. In other words, when pressed up against ideas like Democracy or even Human Rights, the indigenous past offers an alternative explanation and, in effect, an alternative solution to the woes of Modernity in El Salvador. Unlike the fascist rhetoric of black metal, though, this indigenous past is *not* placed within the context of a ‘mythical past’ that creates a system of ‘victimhood’ for the ruling majority – as this would be counter-intuitive to its overall goals. Instead, this very same questioning of Modernity and search into the past is meant as a means of offering alternative and positive solutions to the very same problems. In other words, instead of a fascist program where one class rules over the other and violently eliminates any and all opposition (or undesirables), indigenous thought seeks to offer solutions like agricultural reform and, in many cases, socialist programs that allow for minorities, like the indigenous, to

become a part of the nation-state and, as a result, enrich the local culture as a whole.

Indigenous thought, then, is a liberal ideal that seeks for the equality of all

Salvadorans – indigenous, *mestizo* and ‘European’.

Tribal Metal, *Indigenismo* and Rebellion

The means by which Salvadorans, contemporarily, use indigenous thought to question Modernity is by presenting the pre-Colombian past as something that has become assimilated into a pure *mestizo* population, but as a very real present in both the minds and hearts of the Salvadoran people, and in the fact that many Indigenous people still occupy the rural areas of El Salvador and have yet to gain their own rights under the laws of the current government¹⁷⁷. Many bands begin this task with *indigenismo* by referencing the country’s Nahuatl past through the use of the Pipil people and the Nahuatl language and folklore in their lyrics. While this specific example speaks to a history that seems almost too distant, other examples would include the illusion to the massacre of 1932 and the recent civil war as a means of utilizing history to both construct and (de)construct Salvadoran identity. Of course, with this use of history in lyrical form we run into the connection between Salvadoran literature and lyrical content for which Roque Dalton’s poem “Variaciones Sobre una Frase de Cristo” and the metal group La Iguana’s song “Yes Patrón” have served as prime examples.

The Salvadoran group Araña, self-identified as tribal metal, is one group that uses motifs from the indigenous past in order to talk about issues in the present. This group, amongst others, includes the language and cosmovision of the Mayan-Pipil

¹⁷⁷ The existence of a book like the *Manual de derechos de los pueblos indígenas* [Manual of the rights of the indigenous people] in El Salvador that demands a specific set of rights for the existent native population demonstrates the presence of such issues today - although not directly relevant to this study.

tribes of El Salvador to invoke a past that still has consequences in the present. Their song, “Teotl”, is a prime example of this invocation.

Nuestro dios siendo dual nos guió a enfrentar el temor siendo un pueblo desterrado retomamos lo robado aniquilando a nuestro paso la discriminación. Y cuando crees que no puedes ver en tus manos se encuentra el poder tu decisión es retomar la fe debemos crear una acción. Resistir. Esperar. Destruir. Y caes, caes, caes..... vive. Y caes, caes, caes..... Teotl	Our God Dual being Guided us to face fear Being an exiled people We retake what was stolen Annihilating in our path Discrimination And when you think that you cannot see You will find in your hands the power Your decision is to reclaim faith We should create an action Resist. Wait. Destroy. And you fall, fall, fall.... live. And you fall, fall, fall.... Teotl.
Prevalecerá la unión ante el temor porque estamos preparados refugiados y armados con la fuerza en la esperanza de una sola voz.	Union against fear shall prevail Because we are prepared Refuged and prepared With the strength in the hope of a single voice]. ¹⁷⁸

While the song speaks of the Nahuatl idea of ‘god’, it actually addresses the everyday life that Salvadorans (and others more universally) have to face. The answer to ‘discrimination’ and to ‘fear’ is the three words of the pre-chorus, “*Resistir. Esperar. Destruir.*” [Resist. Wait. Destroy.]. It is one single voice that shouts this motto, the single voice mentioned in the closing lines that gives ‘strength’ to ‘hope’. While this song does create a discourse about modern issues of discrimination, fear and restitution for past crimes, the more important aspect is that it is done through the voice of the Maya-Pipil people, speaking to both conquistador and modern Salvadoran government. It is the same voice that shouts in the irreverent tone of the

¹⁷⁸ “Teotl” lyrics provided by the band, Araña.

Brazilian band Sepultura, “Refuse! Resist!” – a voice found in many other metal bands the world over:

Chaos A.D.
Tanks on the streets
Confronting police
Bleeding the Plebs
Raging crowd
Burning cars
Bloodshed starts
Who'll be alive?!

Chaos A.D.
Army in siege
Total alarm
I'm sick of this
Inside the state
War is created
No man's land
What is this shit?!

Refuse, Resist
Refuse

Chaos A.D.
Disorder unleashed
Starting to burn
Starting to lynch
Silence means death
Stand on your feet
Inner fear
Your worst enemy

Refuse, Resist
Refuse, Resist¹⁷⁹

The point here though is that Araña evokes the indigenous in order to create a space within Salvadoran society for this same type of social protest. This social protest, as we saw in chapter 1, is part of the ‘power’ provided by the philosophy of life as metal as a whole. However, here, together with the indigenous themes, we are seeing a mixture of meta- and micro-discourses. The most obvious of which, of course, is the

¹⁷⁹ Refuse/Resists lyrics, *AZLyrics*.

theme of power. But, much like black metal, we are also seeing an irreverence towards modern society expressed in a rejection of its ideas but with a retreat into the pantheism and cosmovision of the local ancestors. This should not be surprising when one realizes the importance of the indigenous to Salvadoran identity. Nonetheless, it would be an oversight to simplify the matter and say that *indigenismo* is simply an expression of dissent to identities or that its expression of social protest is only related to these identities. *Indigenismo* actually works on more levels than this.

As I have shown, the modern worldview is connected to the ideologies of Western thought. As such, it is hard, if not impossible, to separate the two. Heidegger's five phenomena of science, modern technology, art as subjective aesthetics, culture and the 'loss of the gods' are both essential to and constitutive of the modern frame with which many view the world (i.e., Western metaphysics). The three other shaping factors of this 'view of the world' are, of course, capitalism, democracy and Christianity. On a basic level, *indigenismo* and tribal metal attempt to combat these dominating ideologies (except maybe 'art' as this battle is being held within the realm of music and artistic production) by evoking indigenous thought through their use of the stage and indigenous language, clothing, rituals, instruments, etc.

For tribal metal to function, however, the utilization of the stage and theatricality are essential. Much like Satanism, the presentation of indigenous garb, languages, rituals, etc. all contribute to both the validation of indigenous culture and the propagation of such across socio-economic boundaries. In other words, both the Salvadoran who identifies with the indigenous past and those that do not can participate in the spectacle performed by tribal metal bands. While the first allows their consciousness to be raised and carry on the indigenous past into their daily lives

(through personal practices, political protest, or the educating of others), the second sees the show as something entertaining to watch in which they have no part. The catharsis of the first for those plagued by the weight of the injustices performed against the indigenous by the Salvadoran society and government is essential in dealing with their rage against the situation. In other words, the modern democratic political system and Western epistemologies have such a stranglehold on the average Salvadoran understanding of themselves and their socio-political system that social protest, especially the violent type, has all but been abandoned beyond the stage. The spectacle then replaces social protest with a new form of consciousness raising and the imploration to the public to 'change its ways'.

The rejection of the modern/Western world picture, then, for the *indigenista*, is done by the replacing of modern science (mainly medicine) with the ancestral, tribal form of the same (homeopathic, herbal remedies) in quotidian life. As it regards technology, the *indigenista*, in general, prefers to live close to the land and rejects many of the commodities of modern life (i.e., owning a vehicle, television, etc.). For producers of tribal metal though, many of these things are rejected in ideology but cannot be rejected in practice. For example, while a tribal metal band may refute the ideas of modern technology and science in their lyrical production or in their own established discourses, it is impossible from them to separate themselves completely from it. It is one thing on the stage, but proves impractical in everyday life. A metal band is highly dependent upon modern technology in order to make its music (amplifiers, distortion, transportation, etc.) and cannot therefore completely reject it. This is not to mean that the rejection does not take place but that it is limited to those non-essentials and placed into an overall discourse rooted in the indigenous ideas of the preservation and sanctity of nature and 'Mother Earth'. This is expressed through

the spectacle of the tribal metal show in order to question modern reality but many times is limited to this very same ‘conscious building’ and proves difficult to put into practical, complete practice. The tribal metal band, Indezoquixtia, even defines their lyrical production within these bounds,

La banda utiliza la música como un medio para transmitir un mensaje de conciencia, reclamar sus derechos y defender los de los que no los pueden reclamar, como la tierra, los animales, la naturaleza, además contar y decir la verdad sobre las injusticias actuales y pasadas por las cuales afronta nuestro pueblo, además de incorporar en sus letras temáticas de nuestra cultura maya pipil y todas las injusticias que se cometieron y se siguen cometiendo en contra de toda nuestra ya casi extinta cultura originaria y creencias, tratando de alguna forma de recuperar y mantener nuestras verdaderas raíces e historia, palabras de un pueblo que jamás olvidara ni mucho menos perdonará.

[The band uses music as a means for transmitting a message of consciousness, demanding its rights and defending those that cannot demand them, like the earth, the animals, nature, and additionally tells and speaks the truth about the current and past injustices which our *pueblo* faces, additionally incorporating in its lyrical themes our Maya-Pipil culture and all of the injustices that were committed and continue to be committed against all of our now almost extinct original culture and beliefs, trying to in some form recover and maintain our true roots and histories, words of a *pueblo* that will never forget and much less forgive”.]¹⁸⁰

Lead singer, Saul “Gallina” Martínez Audon, confirms these ideas when he further explains the band’s ideologies:

Yo he identificado tres ideas fundamentales en la letra de Indezoquixtia: las líricas sociales, la protección y conservación de nuestros recursos naturales o medioambiente, y el rescate de las costumbres de nuestros pueblos originarios y de la historia que vivió toda la población. [Es una] protesta en contra del sistema, en contra de las injusticias sociales, de los derechos de todos y todas las personas, las mentiras absolutas, el sistema capitalista, los gobiernos corruptos, de los medios de comunicación amarillistas, la desinformación mediática, la falsa democracia... sin fin.

[I have identified three fundamental ideas in the lyrics of Indezoquixtia: social lyrics, the protection and conservation of our natural resources

¹⁸⁰ This excerpt is taken from the band’s application to the 2015 “Men and Rock 2” Festival which required an explanation of their lyrical content.

and environment, and the rescuing of the customs of our native pueblos and the history that that population lived. It is a protest against the system, against social injustice, for the rights of all people, against absolute lies, the capitalist system, corrupt governments, yellow journalists, media disinformation, false democracy... without end.]¹⁸¹

This explanation, coupled with the summary of their lyrics, then illustrates that the rejection of modern technology and science by means of an ecological friendly discourse towards the preservation of nature is just part of an overall ideology that rejects the modern system as a whole. Here we also see a rejection of popular, modern culture and a desire to replace it with a culture closer to the ideals of the Maya-Pipil people and a return to their “beliefs”. A return to these “beliefs”, pantheism mainly, would remedy our ‘loss of the gods’ as described by Heidegger and would also replace the foreign import religion of Christianity that was forced upon the Maya-Pipil people (one of the many *injusticias* to which the band refers). It also unearths the rejection of the modern world system (Capitalism and Democracy) of which I have spoken and a rejection of those that propagate it. This can also be seen in the staunch anti-imperialism of many of the tribal metal bands. Indezoqueixtia’s song, “Trampas del imperio” is a prime example:

Este imperio te quiere ignorante para que seas su esclavo y explotarte...	[This empire wants you ignorant So that you can be a slave and exploit you...
Las burocracias y las religiones van de la mano para darte maldiciones...	The bureaucracies and the religions... Go hand-in-hand to curse you
Son las trampas del imperio	They are the traps of the empire
Quieren un pueblo de ideas conformistas que les aplaudan la crueldad capitalista... Y una juventud idiotizada por la televisión enajenada...	They want a population of conformist ideas That applaud the cruelty of capitalism... And an idiotized youth Alienated by the television...
Propaganda sucia que engaña a la nación	Dirty propaganda that fools the nation

¹⁸¹ Interview with Saul “Gallina” Martínez Audon.

Está destruyendo a nuestra población....	Is destroying our population...
Llevemos en las venas la sangre pipil Y nuestra venganza será siempre combatir....	We have Pipil blood in our veins And our revenge will always be to fight...
Quieren un pueblo de ideas conformistas Que les aplaudan la crueldad capitalista...	They want a population of conformist ideas That applaud the cruelty of capitalism...
Los imperialistas nos quieren ver caer Pero todos juntos los vamos a vencer....	The imperialists want to see us fall But all together we will beat them...] ¹⁸²

The lyrics to “Trampas del imperio” almost say it all. The modern, Western worldview is something that has been imposed upon El Salvador. Through this imposition, the populace has lost its true identity in its Mayan-Pipil past. The tools used for this imposition are modern technology and the democratic/capitalist agenda of the governments on the ‘outside’. Our answer here, however, is *not* a retreat into extreme ideologies from within the same system, as it is for black metal fans who identify with the Norwegian wave. On the contrary, the answer here is much like the answer proposed by the majority of heavy metal music – an opening of the eyes through intellectual pursuit of alternate ideologies and the spectacle as the means.

Although tribal metal shares a lot with its cousins in Viking and black metal, what is different here is not the idea of replacing the imposed culture and epistemologies (which they all share) but rather the *means* and the *end*. For tribal metal, the answer is not found in extreme violence or social revolt on the personal level – and much less in extreme acts like church burnings. Rather the answer can be found in a personal, social consciousness that is informed by indigenous ideologies and results in social protest. The use of the

¹⁸² Lyrics provided by the band Indezoquixtia.

spectacle, then, provides a space where both social protest and the lifting of consciousness can be done in a semi-pacific (in the sense that it is not violent revolution yet still aggressive) manner and where the theoretical questioning of modern epistemologies can be affectively reproduced for the masses.

While tribal metal definitely borrows from the European traditions (i.e., the use of technology and the meta-discourses of metal), the music attempts to make these traditions local and to use the tools of the empire against itself. By utilizing heavy metal and incorporating the indigenous into it, tribal metal bands can easily show the contradiction between modern society and the visions of a utopian past steeped in the history and thought of its local indigenous community. Like most metal though, at the base of this micro-discourse is the desire to rebel against the *status quo* and to set oneself apart from the system within which one lives. This philosophy then spreads outside of specific genres like black and tribal metal to general philosophy of not accepting popular values and/or behavior and into the living of a lifestyle that directly contradicts and confronts such ideas.

Chapter 4

“Bestias alcohólicas”: Sex, Drugs and Social Rebellion

“El metal es un estilo de vida, totalmente. Es una manera de pensar; es una manera de actuar; es una manera de hacer el cambio. Sí bien es cierto que se pueden dar varias malas interpretaciones que el abuso de drogas, que el abuso de violencia, que el abuso de que quiera decir... de irresponsabilidad. Pero eso es algo que la sociedad quiere que uno vea por ser diferente. [Nosotros] no seguimos un estereotipo... o sea... somos personas pensantes, me entiendes, que si hacemos la música sí bien es cierto que es para eso, es para decir lo que pensamos, es para expresarnos.”

[Metal is a lifestyle, totally. It is a way of thinking; it is a way of acting; it is a way for making the change. Yes, it is true that many bad interpretations can be given like the abuse of drugs, the abuse of violence, the abuse of whatever you want to say... of irresponsibility. But that is something that society wants people to see because we are different. We do not follow a stereotype... I mean... We are thoughtful people, you understand me, if we make music it is true that it is for that reason, it is for us to say what we think, it is for expressing ourselves.]

- Saul “Gallina” Martínez Audon, singer for Indezzoquixtia¹⁸³

While social rebellion can have many faces, sometimes the simplest form of rebelling is in the choice of living an alternate lifestyle. Heavy metal has been known from its beginning to be such a lifestyle. Rebelling against the *status quo*, metalheads are known for questioning the values of society and for practicing rebellion through openly disregarding and contradicting these values. Different from an ideological rebellion, this form is informed by the old rock and roll motto, “Sex, Drugs and Rock n’ Roll”. While this phrase has become quite a cliché in recent years and is not accepted by many ‘rockers’ (especially those bands that preach clean living and sobriety), it exists because, in a general sense, it is true. Many metalheads have no

¹⁸³ Interview with Saul “Gallina” Martínez Audon.

qualms or ‘hang-ups’ about living promiscuously, experimenting with drugs or any other behavior that sets them apart from the rest of ‘respectable society’ (as Deena Weinstein calls it). This is often done with an air of superiority in the sense that the metalhead considers him- or herself to be ‘more free’ than their contemporaries – not only in thought but in the freedom of lifestyle choices.

Unhindered by Christian doctrines of moral living and the ‘modern’ idea of a “good life”, metalheads enjoy the freedom of doing *what* they want, *when* they want. This is not to say that this form of semi-hedonism is unbridled or done without sufficient prior thought. In fact, many metalheads pride themselves on engaging in the lifestyle as an intellectual pursuit. In other words, “my body is free because my mind is free”. Hence, while it appears from the outside as unbridled hedonism, it is in fact an active, intelligent choice to live beyond the limits that others choose to live their lives within.

As part of this rebellion, metalheads around the world choose various ways in which to stage and to act out their social rebellion. While it is definitely made apparent on the stage by the actions and the words of bands that openly promote both drug use and promiscuity, it is even more apparent within the crowd in their lives both inside and outside of the concert venue. El Salvador, as a part of the world metal scene, is no different. As I have shown, metalheads in El Salvador gather together and pride themselves on being different than the stereotypes and the identities given to Salvadorans from outside and from within. While this rebellion helps to further promote the stigma held towards metalheads, namely that they are ‘dirty’ or ‘demonic’, this same stigma is then embraced and turned into a stamp that metalheads wear proudly. Fitting in to society would, on the other hand, be seen as ‘selling out’

and would cause others within the scene to question the validity of the metalheads 'metalness'.

This is not to say that those that choose to live within these moral and social boundaries are outright rejected by the metal scene. It is true that there are Christian white metal bands and plenty of metalheads that are Christians or that choose to live within the moral codes of society as a whole. However, this is not the norm within the community and those that once purported lifestyles of freedom and 'switched' over to 'cleaner' living are often looked at as suspect. Above all, most metalheads have an attitude of respect towards the choices of others as they believe that personal freedom is to be valued above all else. But this does not mean that those that choose to reject alternate living are not suspect to doubt and/or teasing from time-to-time within the community.

In El Salvador, this phenomenon of social rebellion through lifestyle is expressed in many ways. Almost all of these ways are steeped in vulgarity. For many metalheads, the assertion that ideas or words can be 'vulgar' and unacceptable is the exact reason why they should be openly employed. Famous albums, like Pantera's *Vulgar Display of Power*, which features a still of a person being punched in the face, demonstrate that vulgarity and power go hand-in-hand and, as we have seen, this power is expressed in personal freedom. The general idea, or meta-discourse, is that by embracing vulgarity, one is set free from the moral code that defines it. Plus, I've never met a metalhead who does not enjoy seeing other people cringe when they drop an unexpected 'fuck' or nonchalantly mention a taboo subject. This vulgarity is generally embraced by the metal community (almost exclusively as many metalheads know to limit these freedoms in professional environments) and is expressed in different manners. For this study, I will focus on vulgarity as it appears in the

Salvadoran metal scene in the use of pornographic imagery, homoerotic acts, profane language and dark humor, explorations of violence and – ultimately – alcoholism. While each of these can be considered its own phenomenon, I believe that they all reach back to the meta-discourse of vulgarity as an expression of personal freedom and, hence, will explore them all here under that banner.

Pornographic Imagery

The use of pornographic imagery in heavy metal is not a new phenomenon by far. As far back as the hair metal bands of the 1980s, pornographic and/or promiscuous imagery has been a staple of the genre. Part of this is due to the relative freedom that the genre enjoys in the exploration of sexuality. But unlike other popular music genres, the use of pornographic imagery here is often meant to shock those outside of the metal scene and to brand the metalhead as ‘different’ to the rest of society that turns its back to such imagery.

Some of the best examples of this comes from the use of controversial t-shirts both at shows and in public settings. For many metalheads, the t-shirt not only shows their affinity for the genre but is also a public display of their non-conformity to widely accepted values. Bands like Cradle of Filth from the UK have faced controversy over their t-shirt designs – namely their shirt that says in big, bold letters “Jesus is a Cunt”. Apart from the blasphemy on the back of the shirt, the front of the shirt has a full picture of a naked woman wearing only a nun’s habit who is obviously masturbating¹⁸⁴. This mixture of pornographic imagery, vulgarity and blasphemy is often contained within extreme genres like black metal but is present throughout the community as a whole. In fact, it is so prevalent that there are news articles that even

¹⁸⁴ The shirt was so controversial that *Rolling Stone* wrote an entire article trying to explain it: “The Story of the Most Controversial Shirt in Rock History”.

attempt to categorize which shirts are the most offensive (although narrowing it down proves to be a difficult task).¹⁸⁵

The use of pornographic images however spreads beyond the designs of band t-shirts. For example, for a concert in El Salvador titled, “Motherfuckersfest”, which featured bands from different genres but was focused on bands like Emohrs that label themselves as ‘pornogrindcore’, a screenshot of a still from a pornographic film was used as the background of the event flyer. While the picture (too suggestive to be included in this thesis) did not include nudity, it was very obvious that it originated from pornography. The controversy here, of course, is that the use of these obscene, or sometimes highly-suggestive pictures, is a very public act and thus is placed in the view of the public that already has a distaste for the genre and its attitude towards the rest of society and its values. The purpose, however, is much more difficult to get at. While the affinity for taboo subjects like pornography and promiscuity is born out of a rebellion against Puritan Christian values and a desire to express one’s own personal freedom in the loudest and most visual manner, the need to reach outside of the community (which accepts these endeavors) into the community which (we already know beforehand) rejects them is something that I believe is unique to heavy metal. This need is born out of the fact that heavy metal fans and bands must live and exercise their freedoms apart from the rest of society *because* their views are seen as being so extreme and *because* their lifestyle carries with it a stigmatization that further amplifies this divide.

¹⁸⁵ Lawson, *Louder*.

Early scholarship on heavy metal can easily illustrate this divide. In Jeffrey Jensen Arnett's book, *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, we can see how outsiders to the genre often miss the point that these taboos are an expression of personal freedom and how their language in describing metal and its fans can seem extremely judgmental. In his introduction to the book, Arnett describes a metal concert and focuses on the female fans in the following manner:

The girls are noticeable as they walk in to find their seats, not only because they are distinctly in the minority, but because many of them are dressed in highly suggestive clothing. The nature of this suggestion is not lost on the boys around them. One girl walks down the aisle wearing a dress better suited for prom night than a heavy metal concert. It is deep red, with bare shoulders, a mostly bare back, and a low neckline. Wolf whistles, predatory stares, and derisive smiles follow her as she goes.

Other girls wear clothes that are not only suggestive but downright obscene. One girl who walks by you in the lobby is wearing a blue spandex top with no bra. The top button of her faded jeans is open, and the zipper is down about two inches. She has a blank, addled look on her face. Another girl is wearing a bright purple dress with large oval spaces on each side revealing her flesh (and the absence of underwear) all the way up to her waist. She, like many of the other girls, is laden with makeup. But not all of the girls are dressed in this neoprostitute style. Many are dressed like the boys, in the trademark metalhead style of denim jeans, a black 'concert' t-shirt bearing the logo of a heavy metal band, and a leather or denim jacket.¹⁸⁶

It is fairly simple to point out the judgmental nature of such a description. The focus on the clothing (or lack thereof) of the 'girls' at a heavy metal concert wreaks of insinuations of a link between their dress and promiscuity. What is worse, is that this link, obviously from the point-of-view of someone who agrees with puritanical values, is then attached to the idea of money-for-sex, or what the author calls, "neoprostitute style". Of course, what is being asserted here is exactly the idea that metalheads are playing with and attempting to undermine by their behavior, their style

¹⁸⁶ Arnett, 9.

and their general attitude towards society – that personal freedoms are limited by the stigmatization of a widely accepted, Christianized ‘watchful eye’. The author, over the course of the book, makes no connection to the fact that women (or girls as he calls him) have a right to dress however they choose, and that this should not imply anything about their sexuality (especially about their views towards promiscuity). On the other hand, the idea of personal freedom as it regards one’s own sexuality is latent in rock music and metal and is born out of the failure of the ‘free love’ movement of the 60s and 70s. While metalheads have no qualms about exploring their sexuality and consider it a natural part of life, the overamplification of this sexuality is done on purpose in order to point out and battle the *status quo* as it regards sexuality in our modern society.

In El Salvador, there are bands that dedicate themselves to questioning this *status quo*. Generally relegated to the genres of ‘Grindcore’ or ‘Pornogrindcore’, these bands play fast, heavy, sometimes sloppy music that tends to sound like heavy metal mixed with punk music. The lyrics of the bands are often focused on any and all taboo subjects that are controversial to ‘mainstream’ society. In other words, they attack issues that are common to all of us but are not often touched upon by other popular music styles. One of these bands that is very popular in El Salvador is the band, Kraner, whose song, “Bestias Alcohólicas”, I have used as the title for this chapter mainly because they are emblematic of the extreme imagery and sense of humor which I am attempting to illuminate. The drummer for the band, Eder Moreno, explains the use of pornographic imagery in their art:

El metal en si es tan amplio que deja hablar y expresarse en muchos temas, pero el hablar de pornografía para nosotros es hablar de educación sexual, arte y tratando de quitar de las mentes ese idea errónea que la pornografía es mala y hay un castigo divino por ello, al contrario les da instrumento para la felicidad como sociedad.

[Metal in itself is so broad that it allows many themes to be spoken and expressed, but talking about pornography, for us, is to talk about sexual education, art and an attempt to remove from people's minds the erroneous idea that pornography is bad and that there is a divine curse because of it, on the contrary it provides an instrument for happiness as a society.]¹⁸⁷

In other words, pornography, like many themes in metal, is both an expression of power against the status quo and an exploration of taboo subjects in an attempt to 'broaden one's horizons' or to 'open one's eyes'. Pornography itself has often been seen as a means for men to suppress female sexuality through the male gaze and masculine understandings of sexuality (in other words, porn offers how men see sex, and by extension, how they see women with women as passive object instead of active subject). With new advents, like feminist pornography, the attempt to change these understandings of pornography has been made in the direction of liberating female sexuality through the production of pornography. William F. McPherson explains that what is called into question through feminist pornography is,

The binary oppositions: erotica/pornography, liberation/suppression, liberation/exploitation, sexual freedom/sexual repression and, indeed, proper feminism/false feminism. The debate is between feminists that can choose to frame the conversation in terms of: liberation/exploitation, and proper feminism/false feminism; and those feminists who feel this frame marginalizes them and censors them. These so-called feminist pornographers want to shift the frame of dichotomies to liberation (pornography = erotica = freedom) / suppression (fear censorship = repression).¹⁸⁸

In other words, within the world of pornography, the age old debate, which Eder Moreno makes reference to, is whether pornography serves as a means to subjectify women or as a means of liberating women from expected sexual roles in society. As McPherson shows, the debate is still open and feminists, together with the greater

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Eder Moreno.

¹⁸⁸ McPherson, 67.

public, can choose which side to take. While these dichotomies hold true depending on which side of the debate an individual may find themselves, the fact is that many academics and feminists are finding an intrinsic value in pornography where female sexuality *can be* (not meaning that it necessarily always is) liberated from archaic dichotomies and from suppressive value systems, like that of Modernity or Christianity. Within this debate, however, it has been found that Eder Moreno's assertion that pornography *can* serve as a means of "sexual education" is true. For many feminist scholars who research feminism and pornography, this realization often comes as a surprise. Feminist film theorist, Constance Penley, shows this in an interview where she discusses the first class that she taught on film history and feminism. She says,

I didn't set out to teach this as a course about feminism and sexuality; I set out to teach it as a film history course. But here's what happened: My film class, taught by me, the film professor, turned into a big sex education class. It turned into a sex education class, first of all, because of the horrible state of sex education in this country. In one of my first classes, I remember sitting next to one of my students, and it was the first scene of anal sex we had seen in the class. She whispered to herself, "I didn't know you could do that." I was delighted when the sex and relationship peer education counselors at my university wanted seats reserved for them in the class. And then, increasingly, so many of the feminists who work in porn are, or have become, sex educators... Through my guest lecturers, my class has come to understand this whole sex geek, porn geek and radical sex education world. And that's how my film history class got hijacked as a sex education class, and how this film scholar got inadvertently turned into a sex educator.¹⁸⁹

The exploration of pornography, as asserted by Eder Moreno and many others in the metal scene, is done in this sense – with the desire to liberate female sexuality. The point is, in summary, that society and Christian values have got things wrong and only through an open-minded exploration of these themes can one break free of their

¹⁸⁹ Comella, *Las Vegas Weekly*.

stigmatization. This idea of ‘rubbing society the wrong way’ informs not only the lyrics and artwork but also the general attitude of many metalheads who follow this philosophy of life and the dark sense of humor that accompanies it. The intrinsic problem here, of course, is the assertion that pornography contributes to the continued exploitation of women and subjugation of female sexuality to male sexuality. This claim could also be applied to the heavy metal community as it is often a majority of men who are writing and producing genres like ‘pornogrindcore’ and often the lyrics of such music are misogynistic, at best, and can be seen as promoting sexual violence against women, at worst. While the desire *might be* to liberate female sexuality from the before mentioned dichotomies, heavy metal must continue to recognize the instances in which it helps to solidify those very dichotomies – even if female fans and artists are a part of the production.

Profane Language and Dark Humor

Aside from the affinity for pornography and promiscuity, almost all heavy metal bands (with straight-lace bands excluded) delve often into the heavy use of profane language and utilize a sense of dark humor. This humor and choice of vocabulary is informed once again by the attitude that those things that are prohibited by society are the very same things that should be explored and expressed (and that at the root, suppression of such urges is harmful to the individual). Vulgarity here, then, is another display of power. I use this phrase as a direct reference to one of the most famous heavy metal albums of all time – Pantera’s *Vulgar Display of Power*. As I have mentioned, on the album cover, there is a black-and-white still picture of a fist connecting to a man’s face. While the album cover obviously alludes to violence as a ‘vulgar display of power’, I argue that it is in the use of vulgarity itself that

metalheads attempt to display their power over their own personal freedom against the expectations of society.

Part of this use of vulgarity connects to the same ideas of pornography. Like sex, controversy sells. Many bands like Marilyn Manson¹⁹⁰ and Slipknot, while considered more mainstream metal, have become famous due to their over-the-top antics, extreme profanity, use of taboo subjects, open blasphemy and raunchy living in the personal (yet very public) lives of their band members. The argument has been made repeatedly, and with some amount of accuracy, that these bands often become famous *due* to the controversies surrounding their members and their materials.

Within the metal community, the idea often rises that they are only popular due to this controversy and that their music and lyrics lack structure and substance. However, the opposite argument can also be made that controversial bands cannot become widely popular based upon controversy alone, but that the music itself must be able to stand on its own in order to draw a large crowd. I believe that the truth falls somewhere in the middle. These bands are extremely talented at composing music and understand their own role in the metal community. However, they also tend to overdo their controversy in order to promote their bands. While this may seem negative to those bands that try to become popular based upon the quality of their music alone, there is a lot that can be said for showmanship and the use of the stage as a theatrical performance in which societal norms are questioned both visibly and audibly.

Blasphemy, then, becomes a common theme across metal as it is the most direct way of contradicting those values imposed by the Christian majority. In El

¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, Marilyn Manson is both the name of the singer and the band to which he belongs. Here, I am referencing the music of the band as controversial but also the physical acts of the band's main performer. The distinction here is that other members of the band are just as controversial in their acts and discourses as Manson himself, even if they do not receive the same amount of media attention.

Salvador, this blasphemy often circles around the catholic church. Bands like Discordia print t-shirts with distorted drawings of the pope looking much more sinister and evil than portrayed in publications by the church. Some bands, like Social S.S., even have t-shirts with a monkey wearing the pope's religious garb instead of the pope himself. These distorted views, along with anti-Christian lyrics and the exploration of taboo topics like the sexual abuse of church officials against minors, have become a cornerstone of almost all heavy metal, even if they are generally stronger in the genre of black metal for the reasons that I explained in the previous two chapters. The idea, once again, is to be controversial, and in-your-face, about those ideas and values with which the metalhead disagrees or feels should be changed.

The use of vulgarity and blasphemy, then, releases the metalhead from the need to conform to said values. These 'twisted' or distorted' views plagued with vulgarity and blaspheme then inform what some would call a 'dark sense of humor'. In other words, what many people find taboo or offensive, metalheads find humorous. Sometimes they approach these subjects with tongue-in-cheek songs and artwork, and sometimes they are much more direct. The Mexican-American band¹⁹¹, Brujería, is one band that is famous for its tongue-in-cheek execution of songs and their head-on attack against societal norms in both Latin America and the United States.

The band consists of members who don *apodos* and fake identities as *narcotraficantes*. The main lead singer, Juan Brujo, dresses in the classic cliché of a Mexican *narco* with a leather vest, cowboy boots and denim jeans. His back-up singer, El Sangrón, dresses in the style of the *cholos* as made popular in Los Angeles.

¹⁹¹ While Brujería labels themselves as a "Mexican band", I think that it is important to point out that only a few of their members are actually from Mexico and that most of them are from other European or North American metal bands. The singers, however, tend to be either Mexican and Chicano. The band is, however, "Mexican" in the fact that it was formed in Tijuana, Mexico in 1989.

The band writes songs based upon open blasphemy, drug trafficking, immigration, open drug use and sexuality, witchcraft and a disdain for American politicians (like Pete Wilson and Donald Trump). Because of their extreme stance against the norms of society, Brujería has become famous in the metal community on a world-wide level (also because of the participation of metal icons like Napalm Death's, Shane Embury, and Cradle of Filth's, Nick Barker). The band describes itself on its website bio as "a deathgrind metal band from Mexico formed in 1989. We are a group from Latin America notorious for the violent and the extreme. We are infamous for the terms 'Matando Güeros', 'La Migra', 'Marijuana' y 'Brujerismo,' we love to please our public"¹⁹². While the band was officially formed in Tijuana, Mexico, many of its members are not of Mexican descent and, many of those who are, were born across the border in the United States.

However, the identification with Mexican ancestry is part of the same identification that I wrote about with *indigenismo*. Although they may not be 'born' Mexicans, they are part of the culture and heritage shared by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Their songs, like Matando Güeros [Killing White Boys], have been part of the controversy that made the band popular in the first place. News reports in the early 1990s implied that the band was an actual gang tied to both narco-trafficking and witchcraft/Satanism (something approaching a Satanic cult that traffics drugs, much like the charges against the Mara Salvatrucha Stoners). Because of the use of extreme pictures like the severed head featured on the cover of the very same album, Matando Güeros, the band was accused of being involved in actual homicide cases (which, of course, turned out to be far from reality). The band relishes the attention that it gets from its extreme ideologies and especially from inciting the rest of society

¹⁹² Bio, *Brujería.com*.

to protest their music. The stage show includes the brandishing of machetes painted like the Mexican flag that are slapped onto the vocal monitors to create a shocking, clanging sound that jars the audience and incites the movement of the mosh pit.

This jarring theatricality has seen the band barred from some venues, even in Latin America. In March of 2018, when I was on tour with them in Central America, they were not permitted to do their show in Honduras. The extreme right political party, heavily influenced by Evangelical politicians, deemed the band both ‘satanic’ and too close to *pandilla* imagery to be able to play. The band itself laughed off the cancellation of their show and the ignorance of the politicians who blocked them in Honduras. For them, it just meant an extra night in Costa Rica. Apart from being blocked from performing, Brujería also makes headlines because of the attention that they draw from religious groups like the Evangelical churches in Latin America. One such case made headlines because a local Evangelical pastor in Chile, Pastor Soto, showed up with his church to the Brujería show and took pictures ‘evangelizing’ the band. However, as the news article states that while the band received Pastor Soto amicably, “quienes no recibieron de buena forma al pastor fue el público, quien al escuchar la furiosa prédica de Soto, lo echaron a botellazos y escupos” [those who did not receive the pastor in a nice manner was the public, who when they heard the furious preaching of Soto, threw bottles and spit at him]¹⁹³. A testament not only to the extreme protest against religion present in the crowd but also their solidarity as a community with the band itself.

While songs like “Brujerizmo” and “Matando Güeros” may seem extreme to the outside public, within metal this tongue-in-cheek, theatrical treating of

¹⁹³ “Pastor Soto echado por botellazos en el concierto de Brujería”, *La Hora*.

controversial issues and repressed anger (like that of Mexican-Americans against the white majority) is fairly commonplace and relished. Recently, the band had a surge in popularity again when they attacked Donald Trump during his campaign for presidency releasing a single called “Viva Presidente Trump!” that includes a picture of Donald Trump with a machete placed through his face and the words “Fuck you, puto” typed across it. Obviously meant to incite a reaction from the public, the cover of the single shows that bands like Brujería are not afraid to voice their opinions (even when unpopular) and that they do not back down from the pressures of society. But it also demonstrates that underneath the vulgarity and blasphemy, there is an actual concern for modern socio-political issues and a search for an answer to them. Songs like “Pocho Atzlán” that talk about the banding together of Mexican immigrants and ‘white’ Mexicans born in the south of the United States to fight immigration demonstrate a very lucid and intelligent vision of solidarity against the politics and xenophobia of groups like staunch Trump Supporters. Their song, “Plata o Plomo”, also shows an intense desire to deal with the level of violence surrounding narco-trafficking in Mexico and (like its predecessors in the local *narcocorrido* community) issues a warning to those who decide to get involved in drug trafficking – that there are only two payments for their work, plata [silver] meaning money, or plomo [lead], meaning bullets or a violent death. The video features a rush of brutal images from the violence perpetrated by drug traffickers in Mexico and, while not for the faint of heart, definitely drives the point across that it is not a luxurious lifestyle.

It should be no surprise, then, that bands like Brujería are extremely popular in El Salvador, a country that has faced much of the same hate-filled attacks against immigrants due to their proximity to Mexico and the common misperception that Central Americans are somehow “Mexican”. On the night of their show in El

Salvador, the pavilion was filled with people. Easily 3,000 were in attendance and the show was spectacular (one of their best in Central America). When the band is not present, there are often tribute shows at least once a month to the band where local musicians play their popular songs. I was even invited to sing during some of these tributes. Of course, given the tongue-in-cheek nature of the band and their dark humor, the song given to me to sing was “Matando Güeros” (an obvious play on my own ‘whiteness’ as an outsider). The irony was not lost on the crowd, though, and the shows were some of the most entertaining shows with which I have ever been involved.

The dark humor of having a *güero* sing ‘Matando Güeros’ should be enough to illustrate my point. However, it must be mentioned that this tongue-in-cheek, dark humor is not limited to those outside of the metal community. It is often turned in upon itself to make fun of the very same culture from which it is born. In El Salvador this happens in many ways. However, the most obvious way that I would like to investigate is the mocking of the idea that Salvadorans, being of mainly Indigenous and *mestizo* heritage, participate in a genre that is seen as highly European. Like most popular culture movements, these ideas have been expressed through the creation of memes on social media. The meme to which I refer, that illustrates my point, is a still of Mel Gibson giving direction to the Indigenous actors on the set of his movie “Apocalypto”, which explores the Aztec and Mayan histories prior to the conquest (even though the film is plagued with inaccuracies about both pre-Hispanic societies).

In the popular version of the meme, the Indigenous cast members have band t-shirts super-imposed over their pictures. The joke here obviously being that those members of the Salvadoran community that ‘look Indigenous’ are those that seem most ‘out-of-place’ at a heavy metal show. Mel Gibson, playing



Figure 8

the role of the educated and, obviously, European metalhead explains to them the error of their ideas or behavior at heavy metal shows and is meant to promote a sense of culture and established norms within the local metal community. The picture reads, “Look here you pair of posers. True support of the bands is buying their official merchandise, not staying outside of concerts getting hammered on cheap liquor, not shirts made by yourselves and your mp3 collection does not count. Understand, you pair of assholes!”. While the joke is obviously meant to display a sense of inferiority in the culture of the local community as it comes to supporting groups (comparing it to the North American/European ideals of support, which truthfully suffer from the same problems), the use of the indigenous imagery is a reference to the long history of *mestizaje* in El Salvador and the criticism that many Salvadorans (especially those of middle class) tend to associate themselves with North American and European cultures and abandon their own indigenous identities (or at least treat it as inferior).

While the joke is seen as relatable and even acceptable within the local context, it could be seen how this dark humor could be offensive. The meme obviously alludes to a separation in Salvadoran society that, for the Indigenous minority especially, is not really a joking matter. As we have seen, many bands use

themes of *indigenismo* in order to combat this same type of ethnic stereotyping and marginalization and to show that heavy metal is a place where all ethnicities should be allowed to express themselves. However, given the dark humor that is popular within the community, for the reasons which I have explained, it is no surprise that not even the Indigenous escape from this particular phenomena.

The sense of humor that the metalhead enjoys, in general, then, is informed by those same ideas that separate them from the rest of society. Everything that is considered ‘sacred’ or ‘untouchable’ or ‘improper’ is exactly what attracts the metalhead in their attempt to break free from society. Eder Moreno explains that,

El metalero tiene una diferente perspectiva del mundo ya que la gran influencia del metalero se ve reflejada en su estilo de vida y pensamiento sin olvidar su esencia, es por ello que el resto de la sociedad tiene un mundo ciego sin visión a superarse como sociedad... El lenguaje vulgar en el metal [entonces] es sinónimo de decir las cosas de una forma directa y sin perjuicios.

[The metalhead has a different perspective of the world now that the greatest influence of the metalhead is seen as reflected in their lifestyle and form of thinking without forgetting their essence, it is for this reason that the rest of society has a blind world without a vision of overcoming as a society... Vulgar language in metal, then, is synonymous with saying things in a direct manner and without prejudices]¹⁹⁴

Homoerotic Acts

Another vulgar phenomena is the prevalence of homoerotic acts amongst male metalheads. While this is part of the system of *fraternalismo* which I cover in my conclusion, the idea of simulating and alluding to homoerotic acts is quite prevalent in the community. Sometimes this is expressed within the same sense of humor in the community where nothing is considered sacred. At the bottom, it displays a level of comfort both with the person’s own sexuality but also with the sexuality of those around them. In joke form, the sexual innuendos are generally vague and meant in

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Eder Moreno.

jest. While it might seem that at the bottom of such joking is a sense of homophobia, for many metalheads, the truth is that the joking is not done to ‘poke fun’ at homosexuality but to display a sense of comfort with it (and possibly even uncover a hidden homosexuality in the individual). For some, though, it is true that the joking also reveals the opposite – a latent *homophobia* where one feigns a comfort with homosexuality or uses the joking in order to mock and or demonize homosexuals. For it is true, as we have seen with black metal, that many genres of heavy metal are still tied to fascist rhetoric and right-wing ideologies, within which homosexuality is still condemned (homosexuals belonging to those groups of minorities that compromise the “them” of the discourse). What seems to be at work here, however, in many cases (especially outside of the right-wing ideology and fascist groups), is the idea that homosexuality is yet another aspect of human nature that is condemned by Christianity and Church doctrine and is, therefore, something that should be celebrated instead of shied away from. The presence, and celebration, of homosexual artists, like Rob Halford, who came out as homosexual on MTV in 1998, should suffice to show that homosexuality within the community is widely accepted – even if the assertion that metal itself accepts homosexuality with no qualms or setbacks proves to be an exaggeration.

The most common form of this homoeroticism is the making of jokes about a fellow metalhead’s affinity for the male member. For example, many musicians will ask about the skill level of other musicians on their instruments. In El Salvador, a common response is that they “*toca paloma*” [touch a dove]. *Paloma* here means that they play with a high level of skill – they play “awesome”. However, the word is also a vulgarity for the male sexual member. Together with the verb *tocar* [to touch], the phrase also implies that the musician likes to *touch penis*.

Most musicians and metalheads will joke in this fashion, and with even more off-color language, to show their comfort with their fellow metalheads and their lack of homophobia. But the jokes go farther than this. Many metalheads, when they reach a certain level of comfort with a friend, will jokingly simulate sex acts on their friends. From pushing their friend's head down towards their genitalia to "dry-humping" their friend, the amount of sexual innuendo and simulation is sometimes astonishing. Part of this is tied to the *machista* culture in El Salvador where the strongest male dominates both the female and the weakest male. On its negative side, this simulation can also be seen as a display of dominance of one friend over another and, when taken as such, can cause discord between friends, oftentimes revealing both a latent homophobia that some try to cover through a feigned comfort with homoerotic jest and, possibly even, a latent homosexuality that some members of the community are still uncomfortable with sharing. However, on a general level, this simulation is meant as a system of bonding within the community.

Another part of this phenomena is the modern idea of the 'bromance'. Two friends who spend a lot of time together or are constantly seen publicly together are often quickly mocked as being a 'couple'. Traditional questions of who is the 'dominant' partner or 'who is the husband and who is the wife' are common. While this phenomena is not exclusive to El Salvador but is present in most masculine-dominant social communities, the fact that it is so fluid in the metal community speaks both to the strength of the transition of socio-cultural norms from 'Western' communities to more 'marginal' communities and to the centrality of sexuality and promiscuity to the vocabulary and humor within the metal community. Many times, the ability to withstand these jokes without getting offended is also a means of

measuring the masculinity of another male member of the community. If they get offended easily, they are probably not a ‘real metalhead’ or, worse, too feminine.

In fact, the participation in these rituals often earns the respect of fellow metalheads and demonstrates the power that the individual has over themselves. To withstand offense and to openly joke about oneself, here, is seen as an admirable quality. However, as a phenomena, it seems that most of those that engage in this type of humor are generally unaware of its deeper meanings and simply enjoy ‘messing’ with their friends. The fact, though, is that the prevalence of this type of ‘joking around’, which is fairly uncommon in traditional social settings, shows that the metal community has different ideas both about sexuality and what is or is not appropriate in a social setting. At the very least, giving in to or playing along with these jokes *does* actually help to grow the bonds between friends within the community. In other words, you never really know how much you appreciate your friend until you find yourself dancing *rancheras* with a sweaty, 200-pound, drunk metalhead while he tells you how much he loves and appreciates you *and* simultaneously never questioning the highly-homoerotic suggestiveness of the situation. This “never-questioning” could easily be read as a type of latent homophobia where a “real metalhead” could never have feelings for another man, and in many cases, this is very true. In one interview with a drummer from a Salvadoran band (who I will not mention by name), the claim was actually made that homosexuality was not accepted at heavy metal shows and that homosexuals were ‘not welcome’. This is a reality for Salvadoran society as a whole, mainly due to the grip of Catholicism and Evangelical Christianity on the local population and their culture. However, as I have seen within the community, homosexuality is generally accepted as homosexual couples arrive at shows in the area and their public displays of affection are generally not addressed or condemned.

Much like the place of women in metal, homosexuality is an area in which there is great potential for the philosophy of life of heavy metal to provide discourses of power and empowerment for the LGBTQ community (which in many cases it does). While a comfort with homosexuality seen through homoerotic jesting may be simply a start, or simply a local phenomenon, the truth is that the potential for this joking to be interpreted as ‘homophobia’ displays the shortcomings and contradictions of the same. If heavy metal, and the local community, are serious about their acceptance of homosexuality and the questioning of Christian value-systems surrounding it, much work is needed for this space to actually open up.

Explorations of Violence

Anyone who has a general knowledge of heavy metal recognizes that the community and its music has an overt fascination (or even obsession) with themes of death and violence. While this fascination springs from the failure of the free-love movement in the 60s and 70s, where “life and love” were celebrated but found lacking in fixing the woes of society, “death and violence” are the logical expressions (through negation) of those who have become disillusioned with overly optimistic hope. At the bottom of this fascination, however, lies an intense desire to understand violence and its causes but there is also present a seeking of a successful cathartic experience to both deal with and confront one’s own mortality and relative lack of security in life. For bands like Brujería, the use of violent imagery and obsession with violent lyrics is a manner of both confronting the socio-political situation of narco-trafficking in Mexico and warning their public about the real-life implications of becoming involved in such a lifestyle. For other death metal bands, this use is simply a cathartic means of dealing with the same real-life implications of violence.

El Salvador, however, is no stranger to extreme and graphic amounts of violence. While North American and European metal bands generally do not suffer from the same amounts of violence in their personal lives but rather use violence in their lyrics as a fantastical manner of catharsis, Salvadorans use this same type of catharsis to deal with violence that surrounds them every day. It should be no surprise then that death metal (and ‘brutal death metal’), which took time to become popular in ‘Western’ countries, was one of the first, most popular forms of metal in El Salvador during its Golden Age in the 1990s. As I have previously explained, heavy metal in El Salvador began during the oppressive Civil War where the Salvadoran citizenry was caught between equally brutal squads of military and guerilla oppressors. Death metal itself was a manner in which Salvadorans were able to deal, psychologically and emotionally, with the reality of this situation in which they were ‘stuck in the middle’. Rodrigo “Fatality” explains that,

Es que, mira, en aquel entonces [la guerra civil] la música también era un desahogo. Era un desahogo bien personal. ¿Por qué en El salvador, antes, era tan popular el death metal o el brutal death metal o el grindcore? Que era lo más extremo. No existían cosas death melódica, ¿por qué? Porque era también parte de lo que pasaba con la situación socio-política. Era más social. O sea como la gente estaba como suprimida que no sabía cómo escaparse de su angustia, de su miedo, más que todo miedo. Entonces, cuando yo tocaba esa música era como que... Entonces mucha gente se sentía identificada con eso. Y se da cuenta que el brutal death metal era lo más popular en las zonas donde ha pasado casi la misma experiencia [violenta] porque la gente también necesitaba como un desahogo.

[It’s like this, look, at the time (the civil war) music was a means of relief. It was a very personal means of relief. Why was death metal or brutal death metal or grindcore so popular in El Salvador back then? Because it was the most extreme. Things like melodic death metal did not exist, why? Because it was also a part of what was happening with the socio-political situation. It was more social. I mean, it was like the people who were suppressed did not know how to escape from their anguish, from their fear – more than anything fear. Then, when I played that music it was like.... So many people felt that they identified with that. And you realize that brutal death metal was more popular in the

areas where almost the same (violent) experience had happened because the people also needed a way to relieve themselves.]¹⁹⁵

The music itself, however, is not the only means of catharsis. While the exploration of themes of violence is important in lyrical production, the relative violence of the metal concert itself can be seen as a ‘cathartic event’. Many people who have suffered violence, or feelings of impotence against the same, find the releasing of violent emotions to be a cathartic means of dealing with their personal frustrations. The pit at a heavy metal concert provides a space where ‘friendly’ levels of violence are appropriate and acceptable while also being the sight of ‘brotherly’ protection. In other words, while the pit is a place where people get together to shove each other around and to even hit each other, the violence is controlled by an understood system of norms – like picking someone up if they fall down or ‘guarding’ the edge of the pit so that the moshing does not extend into the crowd of unwilling participants. This shared, controlled environment allows the metalhead to ‘relieve’ the pressure of their aggressive tendencies and results in a cathartic release of the same. It goes without saying, of course, that those who step outside of the lines of the acceptable norms of behavior are often met with real violence from both fans and security – an appropriate response to those who come to such events with the goals of *actually* hurting someone.

Lyrically speaking, bands like Perverso, have dedicated their albums and even their entire identity as a band to explorations of violence. Like many death metal bands, their songs focus on the acts of violence of serial killers in a search for an understanding of how the mind of such people work. Perverso writes each individual song as a diary entry of a serial killer writing about what he does to his victims. While

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga.

the songs, reminiscent of famous death metal bands like Cannibal Corpse and Cattle Decapitation, depict a strong, graphic and brutal amount of violence spoken through the words of the diary, they are meant to try and help people understand the inner workings of a ‘perverse mind’. While popular culture has often been obsessed with these ideas as expressed in horror movies and psychological thrillers, some heavy metal attempts to ‘understand’ the thought processes of violent individuals and explore the psychological nature of these individuals instead of simply trying to create a physical reaction (i.e., fear) in the listener. This is not to say that this is not also present, as bands like Slipknot wear masks from popular horror films, but that the priority of *these particular bands* is to delve deeper than most popular culture imaginings into the psychology of violence. These ideas work in heavy metal so easily because, as I have explained, it is a site for the enunciation of those taboo subjects that other contemporary, popular music tends to avoid. In fact, the fascination with violence as a whole can be seen as a response to the desire of ‘mainstream’ society to hide or avoid such topics that actually affect all of us.

I believe that the fascination with violence in death metal (created in Florida in the United States) was initially born from a fantastical desire to deal psychologically with violence that is constantly present in our news but somehow always hidden. For instance, in most North American newspapers, headlines of extreme violence – school shootings, gang murders, etc. – are constantly present in text. However, the inclusion of photos and videos are delegated to the ‘dark parts of the web’. In other words, while we talk about violence, we do not like to see it. Coupled with the efficiency of local law enforcement to ‘contain’ crime scenes from media encroachment and FCC policies that actually prohibit the displays of graphic violence, most Americans can live their lives without ever having to actually confront real violence (or can at least

pretend, often hypocritically, that they do not like to see it). This, in part, can be seen as one of many explanations of the fascination with gun culture and the ridiculous amounts of mass shootings that happen within the country.

El Salvador, and most of Latin America, on the other hand handle violence in a much more confrontational manner. News reports, newspapers and other forms of media often show the graphic scenes of homicides and car accidents. Also, the relatively slow pace with which these scenes are cleaned up and ‘contained’ means that most citizens have come into contact with the results of violent events in their daily lives. Coupled with the amount of violence perpetrated against its own citizenry in the civil war and now during the ongoing battle against the violent street gangs, Salvadorans are no strangers to seeing the real-life results of violence (whether in person or through a third-person medium). This results in an eerie awareness of their own lack of security, an attitude of *carpe diem* towards life (because you literally do not know if you will always make it home safe) and search for cathartic experiences that helps one to deal with such a heavy psychological burden. While some find refuge in religion or hiding themselves away from any real confrontation of the issue (or even fleeing the country), others find their catharsis in the lyrical production of fantastical songs about violence or in the actual physical catharsis of joining a mosh pit. The goal, for most, then is a confrontation that provides some type of relief in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Perhaps the best way to understand this confrontation is through the words of those who have lived it. Rodrigo “Fatality” explains:

Yo viví unas cosas muy fuertes en El Salvador antes de irme [para Finlandia]. Muchos lo saben, no todos, pero muchos lo saben. El secuestro, la corrupción, la tiranía, todo eso a mí me tiene como con ganas de vomitar. Desde que yo me fui del país, yo no quería regresar.

[Pero regresé] porque yo creí que también como todo problema humano hay que enfrentarlo y quitarse el miedo y quitarse todas las cosas. Creo que es la mejor terapia que yo le puedo recomendar a cualquier persona. Si tú tienes miedo a una cosa, o algo te hizo mal en algún entonces y lo tenés, es mejor enfrentarlo. Y entonces, aquí me vez todos los años.

[I lived through many strong things in El Salvador before leaving (for Finland). Many people know about it, not everyone, but many known about it. Kidnapping, corruption, tyranny, all of that gives me like the desire to vomit. Since I left the country, I did not want to return. (But I returned) because I also believed that, like all human problems, you have to confront it and get rid of your fear and get rid of all of those things. I believe that it is the best therapy that I can recommend to anybody. If you are afraid of something, or something did something bad to you at one time and you carry it, it is best to confront it. So then, you see me here every year]¹⁹⁶

Alcoholism

While rock music, and heavy metal, have always been associated with the use of narcotics (Sex, Drugs and Rock N' Roll), the most popular intoxicant at most shows is the always present varieties of alcohol. This is not to say that other drugs are not present. Marijuana is fairly popular and cocaine is easily accessible at most shows – sometimes even being consumed openly in bars and venues. However, the most commonly used intoxicant, by far, is alcohol. This speaks to the history of rebellion in heavy metal as alcoholism and strong drink are definitely moderated or outright prohibited by puritan Christian value-systems. But it also speaks to the party culture of the scene itself.

Most concerts are seen as both a space for catharsis but also as a celebration of life and freedom. At a heavy metal concert, the fans are in close proximity with the bands that they admire enjoying the loudness and theatricality of seeing them live. Additionally, they are joined together with a group of people that not only like the same bands but share a common lifestyle and philosophy of how life should be lived.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga.

The philosophy of life circles around the freedom of the individual to indulge in those things that make them happy (as long as they do not infringe upon the freedoms of others or hurt others – an actual tenant of the Satanic church of Anton LaVey). Part of this freedom is the celebration of alcoholic beverage and its intoxicating affects.

While this celebration is present around the world as part of the heavy metal concert (and even part of small reunions of friends who enjoy the music), the undeniable presence of alcohol at local events in El Salvador also speaks to a history of alcoholism in the country itself. As far back as 1927, Salvadoran writers like Alberto Masferrer, inspired by the prohibition movement in the United States, began attacking the proclivity for alcoholism in the country. His book, *El dinero maldito*, attacks alcoholism directly and even condemns the distributors of alcohol within the country as “sacerdote[s] de la muerte” [priests of death] y “creador[es] de tristeza y de ruina” [creators of sadness and of ruin] – very “metal” labels. His argument, steeped in Christianity and even Buddhism, mirrors closely those arguments of the prohibition supporters in the United States but is tailored to the realities of alcoholism in El Salvador.

This is partially because Masferrer sees the average Salvadoran citizen as inferior to citizens of the United States and of ‘Europe’. At the base of his argument, Masferrer wants Salvadorans to imitate the better behavior of Americans and Europeans. He explains this difference in the opening chapter of his work, *Leer y Escribir* [To read and to write]. He writes,

Si se compara [el desarrollo mental del pueblo salvadoreño] con el alcanzado por el pueblo en el norte de Europa, se nota una diferencia que da lástima. A la par de aquéllos, nosotros somos unos desdichados, sin anhelos, sin personalidad, sin idea remota de lo que es la vida libre; creídos de que la audacia puede suplirlo todo, y hablar mucho es saber mucho, que la discordia es sociabilidad, que ya casi nada tenemos que

aprender, que el dinero es creador de los más altos dones, y el poder es algo que está por encima de la justicia, de la ciencia y de la conducta¹⁹⁷... Nosotros *podemos, debemos* hacer lo que han hecho los pueblos del norte de Europa, lo que hace Chile, lo que ha hecho Estados Unidos, lo que han comenzado Italia y España: formar un pueblo de cultura homogénea con aspiraciones comunes.

[If we compare (the mental development of Salvadoran society) with that achieved by those in the north of Europe, one can see a difference that causes shame. Beside them, we are miserable, without goals, without personality, without a remote idea of what a free life is; gullible that audacity can supply everything, and that talking a lot is knowing a lot, that discord is sociability, that now we have almost nothing left to learn, that money is the creator of the highest gifts, and that power is something that is above justice, science and conduct... we *can, should* do what the towns of northern Europe have done, what Chile is doing, what the United States has done, what Italy and Spain have started: form a country with a homogenous culture with common aspirations.]¹⁹⁸

The ideas of “a homogenous culture”, of course, fall in line with Barón Castro’s ideas of *mestizaje* as a solution to the woes of class division in El Salvador. The result, of course, is an accepted ‘self-colonization’ where indigenous culture and thought are deemed ‘subordinate’ or ‘invalid’ in the eyes of the populace and European/modern ideals are substituted instead. Barón Castro’s views of Salvadoran society, informed by this idea of inferiority, become even more complex when he speaks of the ‘lowest’ level of Salvadorans. Of course, given our understanding of Salvadoran social classes and knowing that a massacre of both indigenous and agriculture workers was already in the work at the time of his writings, it is easy to see that this ‘lowest’ level was comprised of the indigenous members of Salvadoran society who Masferrer sees as being farthest from the European/American ideals and, virtually, holding the rest of the citizenry back. He frames this argument as follows:

A esas muchedumbres de campesinos ignorantes habrá que enseñarles muchas cosas: a no comer en el suelo ni con las manos, a lavarse la boca, a no tener piojos, a no quedar bien con la novia quemando un billete de

¹⁹⁷ Masferrer, *Leer y Escribir*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ Masferrer, *Leer y Escribir*, 17. (emphasis original)

banco, a *no beberse tres vasos de aguardiente de una vez*¹⁹⁹... La vida cotidiana del peón, tal como yo la he visto por más de diez años, se reduce a esto: de martes a sábado, *tarear* [sic]; el domingo, *emborracharse*, pegarle a la mujer, machetearse con los compañeros; el lunes, ir a la cárcel y empeñarse por un mes de trabajo para pagar la multa. En caso de enfermedad, el indio, la india, mueren entre nosotros por falta de médico y de medicinas y por ignorar hasta las más triviales nociones de higiene.

[For those crowds of ignorant peasants will need to be taught many things: to not eat on the ground or with their hands, to wash their mouths, to not have fleas, to not try to impress their girlfriend by burning a bank note, to *not drink three glass of aguardiente at once*... The daily life of the peon, as I have seen it for more than ten years, is reduced to this: from Tuesday to Saturday, *work*; Sunday, *get drunk*, hit their spouse, fight with machetes amongst friends; Monday, go to jail and pawn a month of labor to pay the fine. In cases of sickness, the Indian man and woman dies amongst us due to lack of doctors and medicine and because they ignore even the most trivial notions of hygiene.]²⁰⁰

Given the long history of marginalization against the indigenous beginning with the conquest and continuing through the colonial period (and even until today), it is no surprise that such a strong, ethnic-biased argument would be espoused by an intellect that wanted to move their society closer to European ideals (i.e., *mestizaje* = civilization) and away from anything that could be seen as falling short of those ideals (i.e., barbarism). This argument of civilization vs. barbarity, which connects back to the earliest debates between Sepúlveda and Las Casas²⁰¹ makes sense given Masferrer's affinity for archaic language and his desire that Salvadorans become good 'hidalgos' [noblemen] and practice the rules of the 'caballeros' [knights] – a semi-modern, quasi-Quixotical utopian fantasy. The interesting point here, for this study though, is that Masferrer connects these 'less desirable' qualities of the 'lower' levels

¹⁹⁹ Masferrer, *Leer y escribir*, 20. (emphasis mine)

²⁰⁰ Masferrer, *Leer y escribir*, 21. (emphasis mine)

²⁰¹ Sepúlveda and Las Casas maintained an open debate in the courts of Spain as to the validity of the indigenous as 'human beings', and thus vassals of the Crown, by Las Casas and their 'inhumanity' due to their 'barbarity' by Sepúlveda. Of course, Sepúlveda's ideas of Civilization vs. Barbarity were drawn from Classical literature and philosophy (built upon Western epistemologies) and continue until today in discourses waged against the remaining indigenous tribes in the Americas – something that tribal metal wishes to fight and to replace with Las Casas ideas.

of society in their affinity for alcoholic beverages. His answer to the question, much like the prohibitionists in the United States, was a return to Christian ideals and values. In *El dinero maldito*, he explains:

El remedio está en que advirtamos y sintamos que *religión* no es sólo ir a misa los domingos y encender candelas a los santos para que no saquen premiado el billete de lotería; ni hacerle visitas al Cristo de Esquipulas o rezar todas las noches el rosario, sino que *religión es modo de vivir*: no manera de imaginar el más allá, ni de razonar sobre los misterios, ni de entender los dogmas, ni de hacer la cuaresma, sino *manera de vivir la vida del día y del minuto*: manera de trabajar, de ganar, de ahorrar, de vestir, de andar, de sentir, de negociar, de padecer, de juzgar, de llorar y de reír: manera de hacer todas nuestras cosas, grandes y chicas, notables y vulgares, diarias y extraordinarias; *conciencia y presencia de los Divino en nosotros*; certeza de que el prójimo es mi hermano, y mi hermano yo mismo, y los dos juntos emanaciones y expresiones de Él [Dios].

[The remedy is in that we notice and feel that *religion* is not only going to Mass on Sundays and lighting candles for the saints so that they will help us win our lottery ticket; nor is it visiting the Christ of Esquipulas or praying the Rosary every night, but that *religion is a way of living*: not a way of imaging the ever after, nor of reasoning about mysteries, nor of understanding dogmas, nor of fulfilling lent, but *a manner of living life every day and every minute*: a way of working, of earning, of saving, of dressing, of walking, of feeling, of doing business, of maintaining appearances, of playing, of crying and of laughing: a way of doing all of our duties, big and small, notable and vulgar, daily and extraordinary: *conscience and presence of the Divine in us*; certainty that our neighbor is our brother, and that my brother and I are the same, and that the two of us together are emanations and expressions of Him (God).]²⁰²

The irony here is that, given Masferrer's description of religion and religious experience, heavy metal itself *could* be considered a religion (another reason why I have chosen to call it a 'Philosophy of Life'), or, as popular metal band, Slipknot, says, "we will not repent, *this* [metal] is our religion"²⁰³. Heavy metal meets all of the criteria as laid out by Masferrer, especially since he doesn't *directly* state that religion

²⁰² Masferrer, *El dinero maldito*, 14-15. (emphasis original)

²⁰³ "I am hated" lyrics, *Google*.

is Christianity. Instead, he describes a metaphysical experience that is informed by a Philosophy of *how* life is to be lived and in turn informs the behavior, dress, actions, choices, etc. of those who practice it. In this sense, then, even the ingestion of alcohol and other intoxicants, if done within this context, could be seen as part of a religious experience (as it is seen by many who partake in frequent use). Nonetheless, read within the context of Masferrer's overall philosophy, we know that he would have rejected this interpretation and instead prefer the traditional Christian value system over any system that values personal freedom over personal and public piety.

Regardless of varying interpretations of his writing or the recognition of a certain *flexibility* in meaning within his philosophy, Alberto Masferrer and many other Salvadoran intellectuals helped to form and shape the country during its nation-building process and, in turn, the national identity of its citizens. It is not hard, then, to see how far his philosophy and writing continue to influence Salvadoran society today. Apart from the inclusion of his writings as part of the core curriculum in public schools, local socio-political phenomena like the fact that "dry voting" (a local law that prohibits drinking on voting days) still exist today point to the foundation built by his writing and, in turn, help us to understand how their presence in contemporary society should not be as surprising as they might seem at first glance. It should also not surprise anyone, then, that this trend for an affinity for alcohol continues throughout society and has also become a staple of the heavy metal community.

Many Salvadorans, including metalheads, have used the expression "los salvadoreños tienen hígado para tomar" [Salvadorans have a liver for drinking] when I have asked them about the prevalence of alcohol at the majority of events and restaurants. This phrase expresses the general understanding, at a social level, that drinking is extremely popular in Salvadoran society (and, in essence, mixes it with the

ideas of *machismo* and masculinity). This, coupled with the same affinity for drinking in the metal community, could be seen as a recipe for disaster. While it is true that many Salvadoran metalheads tend to drink *a lot*, I have heard of very few stories where alcohol has caused the direct or indirect death of a metalhead. This does not mean that these stories do not exist and I would tend to believe that they do (even if I am not aware of them), but it means that they are not prevalent enough that the community talks about them or focuses on them.

The community does however attempt to promote intelligent drinking habits on radio and television programs and even at the venues. Many bands criticize newer bands and attempt to help them to understand that playing for free beer, or simply for enough money to pay the bar tab, devalues the hard work that has been put into the local scene and lowers the value of *all* of the bands. This makes it harder for successful bands to charge real prices in order to make a living because the venues can get other bands to play for much less. Nonetheless, alcoholism and the tendency to play for alcohol are both issues that the community itself recognizes and is attempting to correct in all its mediums.

Internationally speaking, many bands in the heavy metal world have come out to speak against alcoholism and even promote sobriety as a healthier way of life. Singers like D. Randall Blythe of the extremely popular group, Lamb of God, have openly spoken about their sobriety and promote it in interviews and even in books. Some bands have even taken it as far as living ‘straight-laced’ (without influence of any intoxicants) but have often come under fire in the community as not being ‘masculine’ enough or for discouraging the freedom to experiment with intoxicants that others might find a necessary path in their lives. While the community continues to openly promote the expression of personal freedom, even if this means

experimenting with intoxicants, it makes a valiant effort in informing its public to experiment intelligently and to avoid such pitfalls as staunch alcoholism, even though this message is often lost on many.

Heavy metal, in El Salvador and internationally, recognizes that it has a different way of viewing the world. Metalheads *feel* like they are different from society and act accordingly. This is the reason why the derision of peers, the stares of elders and the stigmatization and marginalization by society does not surprise them and is even openly accepted. In fact, through the use of vulgarity, blaspheme, pornographic images and the rampant use of intoxicants like alcohol, metalheads choose to express themselves and their view of the world in many ways that are different from other sections of society. While many negative connotations can be easily pointed out, especially from the views of puritan Christian values, the fact is that heavy metal is a place where personal freedom is placed above all other ideals and this is exactly what has helped to make it such a lasting phenomenon that spreads easily across international and cultural boundaries. El Salvador is just one of the plethora of places where heavy metal *seems* like it would not be popular or that it would not speak to the general public. However, given the Salvadorans zest for life, even though the most difficult of circumstances, it is no shock that a highly aggressive music that allows one to express both the best and worst of their humanity has become so popular in such a beautiful country with so many wonderfully talented musicians, producers and fans alike.

Conclusion

“Yo, como latino, te digo, yo he roto las barreras por todos lados y nunca nadie... nunca jamás nadie me ha discriminado, cuando voy como artista de metal. Cuando voy solo como turista, allí sí he tenido problemas. Pero cuando siempre he ido a tocar a lugares, a cualquier lugar, a cualquier lugar del mundo, siempre me han tratado super bien. Entonces, allí te das cuenta que el metal no tiene fronteras.”

[I, as a Latino, can tell you, that I have broken boundaries all over and nobody ever... never has anybody discriminated against me when I go as a metal artist. When I go only as a tourist, there, yes, I have had problems. But always when I have gone to play somewhere, anywhere, anywhere in the world, they have always treated me super well. So, that is where you learn that metal has no borders.]

- Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga²⁰⁴

Heavy metal in El Salvador speaks to something greater than just a philosophy of life that holds the community together in a common bond or worldview. It also speaks to the strength of the bonds amongst friends and the solidarity of a community around national values, identities and citizenship. While metalheads the world over share a sense of *fraternalismo*, or brotherhood/sisterhood, that allows heavy metal and its philosophy of life to transcend common ethnographic boundaries like nationality, gender, sexual identity and even language, this transcendence can be seen at its strongest in small, local communities where the survival of the community and its music depends upon the strength of these ties. This *fraternalismo* has become an intersection between the local and the global within the heavy metal community and, I believe, is the one hope for the Salvadoran metal scene to reach international recognition.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga.

As far back as the early 1980s when heavy metal was just starting, academics began to realize that the fans of the music – together with producers, promoters and musicians – formed an anthropological community that spread far beyond national borders. While many of the early scholarship limited the scope of metal to blue collar, white male teens, it was found quickly that, while this group made up the bulk of the community in the United States and Europe, the reach of heavy metal was much, much farther. Recently, a plethora of work has been written in both academic journals and documentaries as it regards the idea of ‘community’ and the metalhead as an anthropological subject. Sam Dunn created three feature-length documentaries that all focused around the idea of community and this tendency (to focus on this particular aspect of the phenomena) still today fills the pages of journals like the International Metal Music Studies Journal out of the United Kingdom. While it is fairly obvious to see that there *is* a community at work here, and to be fair the idea of the metalhead as anthropological subject even permeates my own work, the fact is that metalheads see themselves and their common bond as much more than a mere community but as a system of brotherhood and sisterhood.

The term that I use here, *fraternalismo*, of course wreaks of masculinity and implies the absence of the feminine subject. Heavy metal, as I talked about in the first chapter, has long been viewed as a ‘boys’ club’ and the role of women in the community has often been relegated to that of sexual object. The apparent sexism of heavy metal is easily visible at almost any show, even though the community as a whole is constantly making attempts to combat this sexism and to provide an equal space for both female fans and musicians alike. The use of *fraternalismo*, then comes with its own drawbacks. Nonetheless, I do not use the term here in the sense of the masculine or in an attempt to exclude the feminine. On the contrary, I prefer to use it

as a genderless term that implies a system of bond that is much deeper than just friendship or sharing of musical tastes, a bond that approximates that of brother and sister. The reason for this is that most metalheads, of all gender identifications, eventually end up referring to each other as *hermano* o *hermana*. The implication being that this brother-and-sisterhood becomes almost as strong as real ties of blood relation – especially for those in the community that are estranged from their own blood relatives and see the group as a surrogate family.

One of the indications of acceptance into this family, in El Salvador (and in other metal communities as well), is the gifting of a nickname or moniker that the community uses to identify individuals. These nicknames are generally related to some physical or psychological characteristic of its owner that stands out and is often filtered through the very same sense of dark humor, as the nicknames are often satirical. I have previously explained nicknames like ‘El Negro Centenario’, which is specific to skin color and the neighborhood where he was raised. But many others are much more simple and even more personal. Rodrigo “Fatality”, for example, gained his nickname for being a fan of the Mortal Kombat video game and for repeating the epic word while drunk. This ‘gifting’ helps one to be humble about themselves and also to feel accepted into the community (i.e., a sense of recognition). Personally, I am proud of the fact that the community accepted me in as a brother and gifted me with a nickname as well – more proud of the fact, however, than the actual nickname. Nonetheless, once you are known within the community by the nickname, it is almost as if your real name disappears and the community knows you solely by that thing that has made you special to them.

Another way in which the metal scene expresses this *fraternalismo* is through the mourning of those metalheads who are no longer with us. Due to poor medical

practices, extreme violence and overall stress-filled lifestyle in El Salvador (and adding on top of this the affinity for drugs and alcohol), it is not uncommon for metalheads to pass away at a young age (even though this phenomena is not exclusive to El Salvador)²⁰⁵. I briefly mentioned the passing of Guillermo ‘Guillermetal’ Hernández in the introduction to this dissertation. Guillermetal, as a founding member of Rocker’s Club, was greatly mourned by the heavy metal scene and is still mourned to this day. Similarly, Carlos Cruz, guitar player for Slave of Hate and renowned Salvadoran chef, who was shot to death on July 17th, 2016 over a fender bender in front of SinSo Loft, still receives messages *en memoria* on his Facebook page and is remembered every year on his birthday with benefit concerts. The fact that local metalheads convene together around the death of a fallen brother or sister shows the strength of the bonds within the community. This however often reaches beyond the local community.

Personally, the death of Carlos Cruz hit me hard as I had met him a few times and he appeared to me a friendly and professional person with a big heart. More recently, however, José ‘Chepe’ Salomón – a good friend of mine and drummer for one of the most popular metal bands in El Salvador, Dreamlore – died suddenly in his sleep from a massive heart attack. His death was felt by everyone who had any connection to the metal scene as he was present at almost every major event and supported anyone and everyone who loved metal. He was a big fan of my ideas for this thesis and provided constant support both on the ground in El Salvador and from a distance via Facebook. My only regret is not having finished the thesis in time for him to be able to read it

²⁰⁵ In the United States, the massive fanfare around the deaths of emblematic artists like “Dimebag” Darrel (and more recently, his brother, Vinnie Paul) of Pantera easily demonstrates the response of the community to the loss of what most consider a family member through music. This phenomenon is tied to the philosophy of *fraternalismo* that exists within the international community and, thus, informs the behavior and philosophy of the regional communities.

before he left. But Chepe's way of life, and the communities response to his death (including memorial videos and magazines), demonstrates how deeply the bonds of *fraternalismo* really run and that metalheads are most often friends for life, and even more so, in death.

Fraternalismo, then, can probably be seen the clearest in the ebb-and-flow of international and national metal bands through El Salvador. Since the Golden Age of metal in El Salvador, bands from Europe, the United States and, especially, from other Latin American countries have been slowly making ventures into El Salvador. Knowledge of the local scene is usually very low, but the desire to play there has always been high. The biggest barrier, at first, was the difficulty of communication between bands and promoters. However, since the advent of Facebook and YouTube, the ability to contact a band to bring them to El Salvador has been reduced from weeks' worth of correspondence to a matter of minutes. The problem facing the community now, however, is the lack of funds to bring 'big name' bands to the country. While many bands that charge less than \$20,000 USD for a concert can have successful shows, those more famous bands, like Lamb of God who charge around \$45,000 USD, are simply unattainable with the amount of funds needed to pull off a successful concert. Nonetheless, newer production companies backed by richer investors have been slowly bringing larger-name bands to the country starting with Iron Maiden in 2016 and recently with Slayer in 2017.

Due to the economic and, even, the socio-political difficulties in staging a successful concert, many of the Salvadoran bands have begun to band together and to blur genre lines in order to keep the movement alive. In countries like the United States, many concerts are programmed around specific genres of metal. Maryland Deathfest, for example, is the country's largest death metal festival and *only* lends the

stage to bands within the death metal genre. This type of concert is generally the most typical in the United States, although record labels have been trying to break this divide for years (a good example being the Jägermeister Tour that featured a virtual grab-bag of different genres and which had obvious difficulties with disagreement between the fans at the shows). In El Salvador, however, the desire to keep the scene ‘alive’ and the propagation of ‘culture-awareness’ within the community has led to a flexibility in concert lineups where it is not uncommon for directly opposing genres to share the stage (i.e., black and white metal or power and death metal).

The banding together outside of genres and the growing popularity of metal, however, has had its downfalls as well. The stronger, and larger, that this brother-and-sisterhood grows, the more it is seen as a threat from those that still stigmatize and marginalize the genre and its fans. In March of 2018, the band Brujería was barred from playing their show in Honduras because the extreme-right, Christian political party that has the majority in the government opposed the band for being ‘too satanic’ and for looking too much like the local street gangs. As the community grows, it will be interesting to see how the local governments and public react to this growing concern. I, personally, worry that eventually links between the imagery used by the street gangs and that used by metalheads will become stronger and will be used against the community by those who oppose it and see it as an affront to society. This, however, is only a real worry if the current regressive political climate continues in the direction in which it had been going over the past couple of years. The hope is that a message of inclusion and tolerance resurfaces soon and that the ‘extreme’, or at least, unconventional lifestyle of the metalheads in El Salvador will not end up working against them any more than it has in the past.

The key to showing that the metal community is *not* a threat to society but actually a system of *fraternalismo*, which I claim it to be, is the further propagation of a heavy metal culture both within the community and projected out of it. This element is not lost at all on the promoters of metal in the country. In fact, since the early 2000s, heavy metal shows on both radio and television have been slowly trying to educate the public (and the community itself) as to the goals of the community regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior. While this is done in an effort to keep the community ‘alive’, it is also done to save venues from destruction, to keep a positive image in the press, to attract more international attention to the community and, most of all, to make concerts a safer and more enjoyable place.

These efforts can be seen not only in media outlets but even in the private conversations and public commentaries of band members and scene promoters. José Roberto “Palillo” Burgos Salinas, lead singer of the popular band Dreamlore, is one person who is always questioning the local scene and its place within the larger community. For him, El Salvador should open up to international influences and try to see beyond its own borders. His following Facebook post explores issues within the local metal culture and displays both the concern and fervor with which local artists attempt to promote a *mejoramiento*, or “bettering”, of said culture:



Jose Roberto Burgos Salinas

August 22 at 4:01 PM · 🌐



Nadie dijo que hacer música extrema en Centroamérica iba a ser fácil. Es muy simple, si vos querés fama y dinero, toca géneros comerciales o tributos. Pongamolo así, entre más extremo sea tu arte a menos público tendrás acceso. Cuando visualizas el escenario de tu realidad te das cuenta de que existe nula difusión del material discográfico de las bandas locales en los medios de comunicación convencionales, salvo en algunos espacios especializados; no contamos con industrias discográficas que inviertan en el desarrollo de producciones, hasta hace unos pocos años lo ha empezado hacer Megarock con un grupo de bandas, más por pasión que por beneficios financieros; desconocimiento general de como se maneja el show business en los países de verdad, aquí se siguen sacando discos quemados como "originales", se siguen realizando producciones que no entran a un nivel para competir con los bandas under internacionales. Lo antes mencionado, más otros factores que entran en juego, nos hacen ver que tenemos que buscar soluciones sustentables integrales nosotros mismos como gestores culturales. Si ya sabemos lo complicado que es el asunto de tocar música propia en el país ¿Por qué nos quejamos públicamente? ¿Por qué le echamos la culpa a otros de nuestros fracasos? Simplemente si sabemos como está la situación, hagamos nuestro mejor esfuerzo e informemonos, además de enfocarnos a buscar soluciones. El Salvador está en el mundo, no es el mundo, si la escena está muy saturada de conciertos internacionales, tributos, festivales y toques, busquen salir del país, exportar música es lo mejor que podemos hacer. Saludos a todos y vayan a ensayar

Figure 9

[Nobody said that making extreme music in Central America was going to be easy. It is very simple, if you want fame and money, play commercial genres or tributes. We'll put it this way, the more extreme that your art is the less access it will have to the public. When you visualize the scenario of your reality you realize that there is zero diffusion of discographic material of local bands in the conventional communication media, except in some specialized spaces; we cannot count on discographic industries that invest in the development of productions, it was until only a few years ago that Megarock was started with a group of bands, more for passion than financial benefit; lack of general knowledge of how show business should be handled in true countries, here they continue burning discs and calling them 'originals', they keep creating productions that do not reach a level that can compete

with international bands. The before mentioned, plus other factors that enter the mix, make us see that we have to search for sustainable, integral solutions on our own as culture promoters. If we already know how complicated the idea of playing our own music in our country is then ‘Why do we complain publicly?’ ‘Why do we blame others for our own failures?’ If we simply know how the situation is, we should make our best effort and educate ourselves, and also focus on finding solutions. El Salvador is in the world, but it is not *the* world, if the scene is very saturated by international concerts, tributes, festivals and shows, then look towards leaving the country, exporting our music is the best thing that we could do. Cheers everyone and go practice.]]²⁰⁶

This is not to say, however, that there is no opposition to the culture as proposed by those at the forefront of the movement. Many fans feel that the promotion of a metal ‘culture’ is an encroachment upon the expressions of their personal freedom. This is the same type of ironic disgust that one encounters against the ‘straight-lace’ people in the community. The attitude, more-or-less, is that debauchery and use of intoxicants is the only *true* way of expressing one’s freedoms. However, this attitude permeates amongst younger fans and those who enjoy metal as a means to be solely antagonistic to those around them. It is not the attitude of most musicians and/or promoters within the community. The best example here would be the attitude expressed by Rodrigo “Fatality”:

Mi punto de vista es que si me van a aceptar como rockero, yo también tengo que aceptar a otros como a raperos, como raggaetoneros, como otras generaciones, como otras cosas que nosotros no comprendemos. ¿Por qué nosotros tenemos que decir que lo de nosotros es lo mejor? Ese es el problema que hay realmente en la sociedad, que no aceptamos que todos somos diferentes. Desde el momento que dije, ‘Yo soy metalero’ y que a mi toda la gente me ignoró, tuve problemas en la escuela, tuve problemas en mi ‘neighborhood’, tuve problemas con mis padres... Yo dije ‘Okay. Yo soy diferente’. Y voy a luchar contra eso, y eso, y eso, y seguir luchando... Desde entonces empecé a comprender... Si nosotros luchamos, y hemos luchado tantos años, para que al fin comprenden que es un rockero, ¿por qué seguimos discriminando a otra gente que se viste diferente, que están en otra onda, que no sé qué? ¿Por qué los seguimos jodiendo a ellos? ¿Acaso que ser rockero es lo mejor que se puede ser

²⁰⁶ Burgos Salinas, *Facebook*.

en este mundo? No, viejo. Nosotros escogemos cada persona que es lo que más nos conviene y que más nos gusta en la vida.

[My point of view is that if they are going to accept me as a ‘Rocker’, then I too have to accept others like rappers, like raggaetoneros, like other generations, like other things that we do not understand. Why do we have to say that our thing is the best? That is the problem that society really has, that we do not accept that everybody is different. Since the moment that I said that “I am a metalhead” and that all of my people ignored me, I had problems in school, problems in my ‘neighborhood’, problems with my parents... I said, “Okay. I am different”. I am going to fight against that, and that, and that, and continue to fight. Since then I began to understand... If we fight and have fought so many years so that finally they understand what is a ‘Rocker’, why do we continue discriminating against other people who dress differently, who are into another thing, who I don’t know...? Why do we continue fucking with them? Is being a ‘Rocker’ the best thing that someone can be in this world? No, man. Every person chooses what it is that is most convenient for us and what we like most in life.]²⁰⁷

For most in the metal community, the attitude of acceptance and tolerance is key.

Being from a marginalized and stigmatized sub-culture should help one to understand the marginalization and stigmatization of others. Unfortunately, this is lost on many in the community who misunderstand the expression of personal freedom as a limitation on the freedoms of others. One specific part of the community, that exists in almost every metal community in the world, is what metalheads commonly refer to as ‘elitists’.

Metal ‘elitism’ is in fact one of the growing problems in the metal community that stands to threaten the survival of such²⁰⁸. In general terms, ‘metal elites’ are those who choose a specific genre that they favor (usually the more obscure the better, like black, doom or progressive metal) and then go about promoting *only* that genre and referring to the other genres as ‘inferior’. This supposed ‘inferiority’ is normally centered around the technical virtuosity of the musicians and the level of difficulty of

²⁰⁷ Interview with Rodrigo “Fatality” Artiga.

²⁰⁸ The existence of ‘elitism’ in metal is a recognized fact that even draws heat from the bands themselves, like Whitechapel, who dedicated their song “Elitist Ones” to people of this attitude.

playing the music but also includes the subject matter of lyrics and the extent of theatricality used in the stage show. For the elitist, their genre is the *only* genre that has reached the heights of musical production and the rest of metal is a bunch of ‘noise’ or ‘sell outs’. I believe that this phenomenon in particular, at least in part, displays a common propensity of the human being to believe that what they like is better than what others like (mainly because they feel that they understand it better than others, which feeds into the personal ego) and is likewise related to the “us” versus “them” mentality of fascists and fascism in the community. However, I also believe that arguments like these started becoming popular in the era when Metallica stopped playing thrash metal, cut their hair, slowed down their music, added melody and – to most staunch metalheads – ‘sold out’.

The problem here is that, while heavy metal is a self-sustainable underground community, the goal for most musicians is to have their music heard by as many people as possible, turn it into a commodity, and to be able to live off of their musical productions. So, in this system, if a musician *does* become popular they are ‘sell outs’ simply because of their popularity. While some musicians have the *sole* goal of becoming popular and *do*, arguably, ‘dumb down’ the music to make it more popular, the fact is that they do not have long-term success because their popularity is not based upon advanced skills in musical production and they generally, pretty quickly, become ‘one trick ponies’. However, bands, like Metallica, who reached iconic status both in the metal and hard rock communities have proven over time that their musical abilities outweigh their choices in musical production and, yes, in hair styles.

For the metal elitist, though, it is imperative that their bands *only* play with bands of the same genre. That these ‘minor bands’ not be given attention, air time or the space to play. The idea is a general ‘cleansing’ of the community of those that are

considered ‘posers’ (an attitude promoted by bands like Exodus and their famous lyrics “All the posers must die”). Nonetheless, what defines a ‘poser’ for an elitist is very different from what defines a ‘poser’ to the rest of the community. Generally speaking, the term refers to those young people who attach themselves to the movement as ‘part of a phase’, who do not dedicate themselves fully to becoming a metalhead, or who use the community simply to ‘piss off their parents’. The fact of the matter is that those people who come into the community for these reasons never truly make it into the brother/sisterhood. They are always met with distrust and even a level of contempt. In other words, being a real member of the community means that one must prove their grit.

In El Salvador, elitism has become a serious problem. With the local habit of identifying oneself with European trends in order to distance oneself from their own Salvadoran heritage and/or society, the approximation to European elite movements like black metal is quite popular. Those musicians who play black metal and more complicated genres of metal feel a general sense of closeness to their European counterparts and a distance from the local. Many times these musicians are upper-middle class and have access both to better instruments/recording studios and to travel abroad. These benefits of social status contribute to the idea that their choice in music is simply an expression of their superior “Europeanness” and is often used to belittle those in the community that cannot reach such a status. For those parts of the community that belong to a lower socio-economic status, and (generally) have darker skin and indigenous features, the term *changoliones*, or *changos* for short, has been applied²⁰⁹. This diminutive term is not only assigned to socio-economic status but also

²⁰⁹ Alex “el Negro Centenario” Palacios defines “Changos” as “Dentro de la escena rock-metal en El Salvador es aquel sujeto que viste de negro con gran plante de metalero, oye bandas de metal pero siempre que llega a un concierto prefiere quedarse fuera a beber licor que pagar e ingresar al evento aduciendo que es más barato beber y que siempre el cover es exagerado o costoso” [Inside the rock-

includes those people that like/produce ‘popular’ genres of metal and those that do *not* follow the established rules of the heavy metal culture. For example, when a band plays for drinking money or gets drunk on stage, the members are generally referred to as *changos*.

This separation within the community speaks to the deep-seeded separation of classes in El Salvador that has existed since its foundation. But it also speaks to the attitude within the community that certain behaviors are acceptable and that the community must police itself by promoting a healthy and vibrant culture that will help to remove some of its stigmatization and, hopefully, allow it to survive and even succeed internationally. While elitists and *changos* might disagree as to *what* heavy metal culture might be, the fact is that both groups are concerned with the preservation of what they love the most – heavy metal. The way that the promoters, and even many of the bands, have dealt with these splits within their community is to constantly demonstrate an air of *fraternalismo* in the press and at shows. In other words, bands and promoters that do not ‘get along’ off-the-stage will put their matters to the side when on-the-stage for the sake of the public.

El Salvador’s Metalfest is the prime example of how the community attempts to keep and grow tight bonds between the different bands, genres and fans. Metalfest includes metal bands of all genres. The only requirement is that they be a local, national band. This allows for metalheads to come together within the community and to learn an appreciation for bands that play in genres that they may not particularly like. But it also provides a space where the fans and public can literally *see* the *fraternalismo* between the bands and the support that they give one another. For the

metal scene in El Salvador is that subject who wears black with a big ‘appearance’ of being a metalhead, listens to metal bands but always, when they go to a concert, prefers to stay outside and drink liquor instead of paying and entering the event deducing that it is cheaper to drink and that the cover is always exaggerated or expensive].

community to continue strong and to grow beyond its national borders (and this is true for heavy metal worldwide), it is my opinion that metalheads must continue to promote and diffuse this attitude of comradery and to continue to include bands and fans of genres that are continually in flux.

The question then is, Where is this community headed? What will it look like in 5, 10, 15 years down the road? I believe that with the continued development of a ‘national’ metal identity – i.e., Salvadoran metal – the musical scene and the ties between its brothers and sisters continues to grow stronger and stronger and to reach farther and farther. Since 2000, a few bands have successfully left El Salvador and played concerts in both the United States and Europe. Bands, like Virginia Clemm and Araña, have had the opportunity to play at Wacken Open Air Festival in Germany and to also open for headliners like Slayer and Iron Maiden. Other bands, like Conceived by Hate, have even toured Europe as part of official death metal tours and have had a high rate of success in spreading their music across the Atlantic. With the invention of YouTube, iTunes and Facebook, the movement of bands has become easier and easier. In the future, hopefully, these same tools will help to bring more and more attention to the local community as the international community becomes more aware of their presence and their productions.

What is lacking, however, is an ‘industry’ that promotes heavy metal within the country itself. Currently, the majority of the footwork for concerts is done by local promoters who must have their own funds to invest in concerts, or must earn the funds by tirelessly and endlessly promoting their events throughout the country (a truly exhausting task). Like most capitalistic endeavors, however, the attractions of investors, or *patrocinadores*, is key to the survival of the community. Currently, local beer producers like La Constancia will invest a minimum amount in metal shows of

the local variety and a portion more for international, “not-so-obscure” bands. But, nonetheless, the majority of heavy investors, both in El Salvador and in the United States, do not see investing in the local community or its bands as a profitable task. In fact, their attitude most of the time is to shut out the bands completely, opting for more traditional, tropical music acts that draw a bigger crowd but that greatly paralyze the production of other genres of music. Edwin Marinero explains that,

Quienes tienen el candado de la puerta para que las bandas de metal puedan ir a los estados unidos la tiene la gente vieja la cual no da el espacio al metal y al rock, que lo tiene bien merecido, y triunfará más una banda de este tipo allá en los estados unidos porque es el género que más se identifica con la cultura de Norteamérica, el metal. Pero la gente está tan aferrada a llevar cumbias a llevar bandas que suenan como ska/reggae... no les quieren dar chance al rock ni al metal. Sabiendo de que esa es la escena más original que hay, más prospera. Pero como los que tienen el pase de entrar a estados unidos son gente vieja, incapaz y tonta no le da el chance... Yo creo que si media vez se abra eso, allí va a ser el momento de repunte de las bandas salvadoreñas, lo que están esperando las bandas salvadoreñas, salir del país a triunfar, a demostrar que se están haciendo cosas, tal vez no iguales a los norteamericanos pero similares, pero ya estando allí lo pueden lograr pero eso es lo que no quieren. Pero yo creo de que es lo que faltaría. O sea, que esa puerta, que alguien se encarga de abrirla [para] las bandas.

[Those who have the key to the door so that the metal bands can go to the United States are old people who will not allow a space for metal and rock, which deserves it and would succeed more than similar bands in the United States because it is the genre that most people identify with in North American culture, metal, but the people that are so stuck on taking *cumbias*, taking bands that sound like ska/reggae... don't want to give a chance to rock or metal, knowing that it is the most original scene that exists, most prosperous. But since those that hold the 'entrance pass' to the United States are old, incapable and dumb people, they do not give it a chance... I believe that given the chance that it opens up, that will be the moment of reprieve for the Salvadoran bands, that which the Salvadoran bands have been waiting for, to go out of the country and to triumph, to demonstrate that they are doing things, maybe not equal to the Americans but similar to them and once they are there they can achieve it because that is what they want. I believe that that is what is missing. I mean, that that door, that somebody take the initiative to open it for the bands.]²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Interview with Edwin Marinero.

The ‘key’ then, for Marinero, is that other Salvadorans who have made it to the United States and successfully promote music within its borders begin to allow a space for the Salvadoran metal bands to play and to prosper. I agree that this is one way in which the Salvadoran community, at least, could help to promote its own artists abroad. I also believe, however, that visibility is key for the Salvadoran community to survive and to prosper. In other words, within its current context, Salvadoran metal is extremely popular within its borders and in neighboring countries. In fact, it has probably the most successful metal community in Central America. However, this popularity has failed to reach farther than the region.

Even with the technological tools that are available to Salvadorans, it is hard to make progress without interest from those ‘outside’ of its borders. Part of the problem is the marginalization of the country and citizens in the world press. Stories about El Salvador are often reduced to news clippings about gang violence and dirty politicians. It is rare that international news programs, even of the Latino variety, provide a space for local musicians – especially those playing underground music like heavy metal. In this environment, and lacking its own industry, the local metal community continues to strive along, fighting one battle after another, but never losing enthusiasm for its dream to join North American and European bands in the halls of fame.

The difficulty under which the Salvadoran metalhead continues to fight for the life and success of its community is phenomenal. This is one of the reasons why I have become personally attached to the movement and wanted to write about it in the first place. The metal community in El Salvador speaks to both a deep and rich history within the country and the constant struggle for international recognition. The fact that the country is still referred to as ‘third world’ and that its highly trained and

professional musicians receive virtually no assistance in the promotion of their craft is equally frustrating as it is laughable. In general, I have found that, when speaking to others about the heavy metal community in El Salvador, I am met with comments like, “I did not know that they had heavy metal”, “Is it any good?”, “Aren’t the production values lower there?”, “Why would they want to play heavy metal?”, etc. The general attitude is that El Salvador somehow exists *outside* of the modern world system as a relic of pre-modern times and that the country only contains beautiful beaches, tourist spots, volcanos, tropical music and artisans who make clay pottery (all things which are promoted in travel books and even on in-flight commercials en route to the region). It is rare that I encounter someone who is not surprised by the existence of the community or, even better, knows much about it.

As an academic, I feel that the lack of a space for Salvadoran writers, musicians, artists, etc. is a big blind spot in the field of cultural studies. Most literature courses never mention Salvadoran (or even Central American) authors, with the exception of Ruben Darío and Roque Dalton, and culture courses reduce the country to the aspects that I have previously mentioned. While plenty of academic works exist that *do* attempt to promote a more diverse view of the country, I have seen that they are generally summarized within discourses about the region as a whole and specific classes about the subject matter are few and far between. With the growing Salvadoran immigrant population in the United States, and the advancement of DREAMers into academics, I feel that soon these students will be asking *why* their countries are not represented to the extent that Mexico, Peru or Brazil are represented. I hope that in the future these same students will help to build and promote an academia that recognizes the beauty and richness of the intellectual and cultural

production of their countries and that more attention is given to truly investigating the region in *all* of its complexities.

That being said, I also hope that the Salvadoran metal community is able to draw the attention that I know that it deserves. Salvadoran metalheads work hard and have fought hard to keep their community alive. It would be a shame to see it dwindle down to small numbers or, worse, to even disappear. But given the enthusiasm and determination of promoters like Edwin Marinero and musicians like Rodrigo “Fatality”, I doubt that this will ever happen. It is my hopes that this dissertation and the time and energy that I have dedicated to researching the community will not be in vain but will help to provide another space in which Salvadoran metalheads are given the recognition that they deserve. I wish nothing more than continued success and international recognition for my Salvadoran brother and sister metalheads and hope that this dissertation can somehow form a small part of the same.

Discography

I have provided this list of Salvadoran metal artists as a reference for those interested in learning more about them and their music. The bands that are in **bold** letters are “major” bands that have recorded discs, played internationally or ‘made it big’ in the local scene. Bands with an * are those bands that are mentioned in this thesis. All of the albums listed below are full-length, studio albums unless otherwise noted in the citation.

It should also be noted that some of the bands mentioned have not yet recorded studio albums but are important to the local scene. Many times the bands’ songs are known from live events before they are recorded onto a medium. Also, some of these bands have broken up and their members dispersed or formed into new bands. The original members of Aborigenes, for example, are now the guiding force of Araña (whose bass player left and then formed the band Kab’rakan). Also, two of the members of Virginia Clemm have moved on to create There Will Be Hate.

A

*Aborigenes. (Groove/Thrash/Tribal Metal). *Sentenciados por la ignorancia*. EP. Nocturnal Entertainment Productions, 2003.

***Aeon Veil**. (Deathcore). *Nacer, Crecer, Morir*. 2016.

- *El ilusionista*. 2017.

Angelus. (Heavy Metal). *Cabalgando en el abismo*. Demo. American Line Productions. 2001.

- *Dos*. American Line Productions. 2003.

Apes of God. (Thrash/Death Metal). *Fuck off!* EP. 2017.

- *Misanthropy*. 2018.

***Araña**. (Tribal Metal). *Teotl*. American Line Productions. 2009.

Assfixia. (Thrash Metal). *Sin oportunidad*. Assfixia Records. 2014.

- *El fin de los malditos*. Assfixia Records. 2015.

Auré. (Melodic Doom/Death Metal). *La muerte se olvidó de ti*. 2017.

Aurora. (Gothic Metal). *Moris Praeludium: Live at Nokturnal Fester 2015*. 2016.

B

Berserk. (Thrash Metal). *Thrashing Machine*. EP. 2008.

Bimetal. (Heavy Metal). *La calavera del Metal*. EP. 2011.

***Broncco**. (Heavy Metal/Hard Rock). *B’rock*. 1996.

C

*Clair de Lune. (Neoclassical/Avant-garde Metal). *Victims of Selfishness*. Single. 2013

- *Live Takes*. Demo. 2015.

***Conceived by Hate**. (Death/Thrash Metal). *Witness of Decay*. EP. Morbid Skull Records. 2009.

- *Pestilence Reborn*. Morbid Skull Records. 2012.
- *Death & Beyond*. Morbid Skull Records. 2016.

D

Diabolus. (Heavy Metal). *En estos días malditos*. 2015.

Discordia. (Death Metal/Grindcore). *Nuestros restos*. 2013.

Dismal Gale. (Melodic Black/Death Metal). *Dismal Serenades*. 2006.

***Dreamlore**. (Death Metal). *Negative Specter*. American Line Productions. 2003.

- *Black Plague Possessed*. American Line Productions. 2009.
- *The Machinery of Misery*. American Line Productions. 2013.

E

El vacío tiene ojos. (Deathcore). *Incesante*. 2018.

Emohrs. (Brutal Death Metal/Grindcore). *Laboratorio de perversiones*. 2011.

En Memoria. (Heavy Metal). *Live & en concierto en Nuestra América*. Live álbum. 2013.

Era de Miseria. (Heavy Metal). *Dictadores de la fe*. Demo. 2002.

F

Fleshless Entity. (Death Metal). *Nihilty Servants*. EP. 2016.

G

Gaia Metal. (Progressive Heavy Metal). *Espíritu y tierra*. Kontakt. 2007.

- *Armonía de fuego*. Kontakt. 2010.
- *El jardín de los despojos*. Kontakt. 2017.

Genetic Disorder. (Technical Thrash Metal). *Cosmic Terror*. EP. 2016.

Genocidium. (Black Metal). *Total War!!* EP. Warhemic Productions. 2010.

- *Anti-human Nuclear Hatred*. Warhemic Productions. 2016.
- *Iron & Blood*. EP. Warhemic Productions. 2018.

H

Hazardous Mutation. (Crossover/Thrash Metal). *Annihilation for Radiation*. EP. 2012.

- *Reactor 4: 26-04-86*. 2013.
- *I Want Your Death*. EP. 2014.

Hemisferium. (Heavy/Thrash Metal). *Demo 2014*. Demo. 2014.

***Heresies.** (Groove/Death Metal). *Awakening the Madness*. 2011.

Hobbits. (Heavy Metal). *Guerrero ancestral*. Demo. 2008.

- *Loki*. Demo. 2014.

I

Icarus. (White/Power Metal). *Busca y encontrarás*. EP. 2006.

***Indezoquixtia.** (Crossover/Thrash/Tribal Metal). *Indígenas sangrando libertad*. Midinti Records. 2015.

Inhuman. (Death Metal). *Infernal Desires*. EP. 2018.

K

Kab'rakan. (Death Metal). *Demo*. Demo. 2017.

***Kabak.** (Brutal Death Metal/Grindcore). *Descomposición cerebral*. 1998.

- *Crónicas del quirófano*. 2002.

Kabala. (Heavy/Speed/Tribal Metal). *Conquistador*. 2006.

- *Acero*. 2007.
- *Sinfonia de la muerte*. 2012.

***Kataplexia.** (Brutal Death Metal). *Morgue's Reality*. Xtream Music. 2003.

- *Catastrophic Scenes*. Xtream Music. 2005.
- *Supreme Authority*. Xtream Music. 2008.
- *Genetic Intervention*. EP. Xtream Music. 2014.
- *Scenes of Supreme Reality*. Boxed Set. Xtream Music. 2017.

***Kraner.** (Death/Thrash Metal). *Humanidad sin salvación*. 2007.

- *Concebidos en la maldad y la locura*. 2016.

M

Maldek. (Black/Death Metal). *Pesadilla sangrienta*. 2017.

*Malignant Wizard. (Black Metal). *Malignant Wizard*. Nocturnal Entertainment Productions. 2012.

N

Nuclear War. (Thrash Metal). *War Dance*. EP. 2018.

P

Pegasso. (Heavy Metal). *Galopa en el viento*. Enamu Productions. 2013.

- *Pegasso*. Enamu Productions. 2016.

*Perverso. (Death Metal). No album or demo publicly available.

R

Raices Torcidas. (Groove/Nu-Metal/Brutal Death Metal/Industrial). *Evolución*. American Line Productions. 2001.

- *Virus*. American Line Productions. 2003.
- *Digital Metal Flesh*. American Line Productions. 2007.

Renegado. (Death/Thrash Metal). *Pesadilla sin final*. 2000.

Repugnant Disorder. (Brutal Death Metal). *Malformación severa intracraneal*. 2015.

S

*Selvtier. (Melodic Doom/Death/Tribal Metal). *Cuando en el bosque llueve sangre*. 2012.

- *Por la tierra donde los reyes mueren*. 2014.

***Social S.S.** (Crossover/Thrash Metal). *S.S.S. Sick Sound Special: First Tape Trading*. EP. 2011.

- *Krokodil*. EP. 2014.
- *Rápido, corrupto y letal*. 2016.
- *Patria negra*. 2018.

Sonsohell. (Thrash Metal). *Welcome to Sonsohell*. EP. 2018.

T

There Will Be Hate. (Brutal Death Metal). *There Will Be Hate*. 2018.

Torniquete. (Thrash Metal). No album or demo published yet.

V

Vertigo. (Heavy Metal). *Heroína del infierno*. Nocturnal Entertainment Productions. 2003.

Vibora. (Heavy/Glam Metal). *Vibora*. 2009.

- *Terror sv.* EP. 2011.

***Virginia Clemm.** (Deathcore). *Veneno en el espejo*. EP. 2008.

- *Una eternidad de incertidumbre*. 2010.
- *Sin misericordia*. 2013.
- *Virginia Clemm 4*. 2016.

Works Cited

Adhesivo. Lyrics to “Vale Verga”. *Musixmatch*.

<https://www.musixmatch.com/es/letras/Adhesivo/Vale-Verga-Bonus>.

Anderson, Thomas P. *Matanza; El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971. Print.

Araña. Lyrics to “Teotl”. *Musixmatch*.

<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Ara%C3%B1a/Teotl>.

Arnett, Jeffrey. *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*. Boulder: Routledge, 2018. Print.

Ardon, Roberto “Ula Ula”. Personal interview. Nov 2015.

Artiga, Rodrigo “Fatality” (Kabak, Kataplexia, Thrashgrinder). Personal interview. Dec 2016.

Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. 16 Vol. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. Print.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1953, 2003. Print.

Barón Castro, Rodolfo. *La Población De El Salvador*. 2nd ed. 1 Vol. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978. Print.

“Bio”. *Brujería.com*. 2016. Web. 11 Sept. 2018. <https://www.brujeria.com/bio/>.

- Burgos Salinas, Jose Roberto. "Facebook Post". *Facebook*. 22 Aug 2018. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10160938397895372&id=840355371.
- Chapstick, Kelsey. "Why It's Important to Stop Using 'Female-Fronted' as a Metal Genre Right Now". *Metal Sucks*. 7 Feb. 2018. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
- Ching, Erik Kristofer. *Authoritarian El Salvador*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Print. From the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies.
- Clar de Lune. Personal interview. June 2015.
- Comella, Lynn. "Film Professor Constance Penley on Sex, Education... and Sex Education". *Las Vegas Weekly*. 7 Nov 2012. Web. 20 Sept. 2018.
- Conceived by Hate. Personal interview. Dec 2014.
- Dalton, Roque, and Juan Carlos Berrio. *Roque Dalton: Antología*. 1 de Txalaparta ed. 3 Vol. Tafalla, Nafarroa Spain: Txalaparta, 1995. Print.
- Dalton, Roque, et al. *Poemas Clandestinos = Clandestine Poems*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1990. Print.
- Delcid, Merlín. "Investigan al expresidente de El Salvador Francisco Flores por supuesta malversación." *CNN Español*. 9 Jan. 2014. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
<https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2014/01/09/investigan-al-expresidente-de-el-salvador-francisco-flores-por-supuesta-malversacion/>.

Dreamlore. Personal interview. Nov 2015.

Egginton, William. *How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003. Print.

El Salvador Agreements: The Path to Peace. New York, NY: United Nations, 1992. Print.

Epstein, Dan. "The Story of the Most Controversial Shirt in Rock History." *Rolling Stone*. 25 June 2015. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/the-story-of-the-most-controversial-shirt-in-rock-history-20150625>.

"Estas se lucen en la escena metalera: Las chavas son las vocalistas de sus respectivas bandas. Todas poseen una amplia trayectoria en la música". *Más*. 29 Jan. 2018. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.

Goodman, Eleanor. "Does metal have a sexism problem?". *Metal Hammer*. 12 Feb. 2018. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.

Gould, Jeffrey L., and Aldo Lauria-Santiago. *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.

Grieb, Kenneth J. "The United States and the Rise of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 3.2 (1971): 151. Print.

Hazardous Mutation. Personal interview. June 2015.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Print.

Hemisferium. Personal interview. June 2015.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Print.

“Indigenismo”. *Rae.es*. Real Academia Española. 2018. Web. 11 Sept 2018.

<http://dle.rae.es/?id=LOUggi7>.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. 4th ed.

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974. Print.

Kisser, Andreas (Sepultura). Personal interview. April 2016.

Landos, Kriscia (Aeon Veil). Personal interview. 16 Jan 2018.

LaVey, Anton Szandor. *The Satanic Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 1969. Print.

LaVey, Anton Szandor. *The Satanic Rituals: Companion to the Satanic Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 1972. Print.

LeVine, Mark. *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008. Print.

Lawson, Dom. “The 10 most offensive band t-shirts ever.” *Louder*. 27 Nov 2015.

Web. 11 Sept. 2018. <https://www.loudersound.com/features/the-10-most-offensive-band-t-shirts-ever>.

Lindo-Fuentes, Héctor, Erik Kristofer Ching, and Rafael Lara Martínez.

Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque

- Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Print.
- “Maras declaradas ‘grupos terroristas’”. *El Nuevo Diario*. 25 Aug. 2015. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
- Marinero, Edwin. Personal interview. Oct 2015.
- Marinero, Oscar Leiva. “Historias del Rock.” *ElFaro.net*. 25 April 1998. Web. 11 Sept. 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/the-story-of-the-most-controversial-shirt-in-rock-history-20150625>.
- Martínez Audon, Saul Armando “Gallina” (Indezoquixtia). Personal interview. Oct 2015.
- Masferrer, Alberto. *Leer y escribir*. N.p., n.d. Print.
- Masferrer, Alberto. *El dinero maldito*. N.p., n.d. Print.
- McPherson, William F. "Feminism, Pornography, Censorship: Deconstructing the Dichotomies of Feminist Pornography." *Florida Communication Journal* 22.2 (1994): 66. Print.
- Morales, Eric “Erico la Bestia” (Dantesco). Personal interview. Sept 2015.
- Moreno, Eder (Kraner). Personal interview. 19 June 2018.
- Moynihan, M. and Didrik, S. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Washington: Feral House, 2003. Print.

Pack, Christian. ““Severed Reality’: Representations of reality in Salvadoran tribal metal”, *Metal Music Studies*, 4:1, pp. 187-196, doi: 10.13186/mms.4.1.187_1. Print.

Palacios, Alexander “Negro Centenario” (Social S.S./Chaos from Death). Personal interview. Nov 2015.

Pantera. Lyrics to “Mouth for War”. *Google*.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=mouth+for+war+lyrics&oq=Mouth+for+war+lyrics&aqs=chrome.0.0l6.10156j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Pantera. Lyrics to “War Nerve”. *Google*.

https://www.google.com/search?safe=off&ei=7sD5WqPzDNGp_Qa8xbX4Cw&q=war+nerve+lyrics&oq=war+nerve+lyrics&gs_l=psy-ab.3..0l2.3008.5971.0.6030.18.17.1.0.0.0.166.1567.9j6.15.0..2..0...1.1.64.psy-ab..2.16.1547...35i39k1j0i131k1j0i67k1j0i20i264k1j0i131i67k1j0i20i263i264k1j0i20i263k1j0i22i30k1j0i13k1.0.Q2QBbcKHJNA

“Pastor Soto es echado a botellazos de concierto de Brujería.” *La Hora*. 3 April 2017.

Web. 11 Sept. 2018. <http://www.lahora.cl/2017/04/pastor-soto-echado-botellazos-concierto-brujeria/>.

Pearce, Trevor. ""Science Organized": Positivism and the Metaphysical Club, 1865-1875." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76.3 (2015): 441. Print.

Pineda, Gustavo, et al. *Manual de derechos de los pueblos indígenas*. San Salvador, El Salvador: Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, n.d. Print.

Quijada, Paul and Gerardo José (Perverso). Personal interview. Dec 2014.

Rosales, Giovanni (Heresies). Personal interview. Dec 2014.

Savigny, Heather and Sam Sleight. "Postfeminism and heavy metal in the United Kingdom: Sexy or sexist?", *Metal Music Studies*, 1: 3, pp. 341-357, doi: 10.1385/mms.1.3.341_1. Print.

Sepultura. Lyrics to "Refuse/Resist". *AZLyrics.com*.
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sepultura/refuseresist.html>.

Sibrian, Vicente "Chente" (Broncco). Personal interview. Nov 2015.

Slipknot. Lyrics to "I am Hated". *Google.com*.
https://www.google.com/search?safe=off&ei=lEnNW86ZIO_K5gKpsJ6IDw&q=i+am+hated+slipknot+lyrics&oq=we+will+not+repent+this+is+our+religion+slipknot&gs_l=psy-ab.1.1.0i7118.0.0..1583686...0.0..0.0.0.....0.....gws-wiz.7myrBYjk60U.

Soulfly. Lyrics to "Jumpdafuckup". *DarkLyrics.com*, copyright 2001-2006.
<http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/soulfly/primitive.html#4>.

Sloterdijk, Peter, and Mario Wenning. *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print.

"Subaltern." *OxfordReference.com*. Oxford Reference. 2018. Web. 11 Sept. 2018.
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100539334>

Villalta, Francisco "Chele Dismember". Personal interview. Dec 2014.

Walser, Robert. *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hannover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993. Print.

Ward, Thomas W. *Gangsters without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

Weber, Samuel. *Theatricality As Medium*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. Print.

Weinstein, Deena. *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Lexington Books; Toronto, 1991. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York and London Verso, 1989, 2008. Print.

Biography

Christian Pack was born in Waynersboro, PA on August 4th, 1985. He started his work on his doctoral thesis at Johns Hopkins University in September of 2012 after completing his undergraduate degrees in Spanish and Film Production at Towson University in Maryland. Since 2014, he has collected over 4½ hours of recorded interviews with band members, promoters, fans and members of the media in El Salvador. He has also performed live in El Salvador; assisted in the promotion and execution of concerts; was interviewed on various Salvadoran radio and television shows; and toured through Central America with the bands Brujería and Kataplexia in March of 2017. He was awarded a Singleton Travel Fellowship for research in the summer of 2015 and a Dean's Teaching Fellowship in the fall of 2017 to teach his course, "*Gritemos por no olvidar: A Survey of Heavy Metal Music and Culture in Latin America.*" His first article, "'Severed Reality': Representations of reality in Salvadoran tribal metal," was published in Volume 4, Issue 1 of the *Metal Music Studies Journal* in March of 2018. He currently lives with his wife, Dinora Pack, and children in Gaithersburg, MD and sings in the local metal band, Burn N' Bleed.